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MABEL'S ISLAND

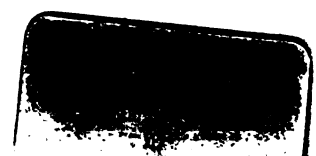
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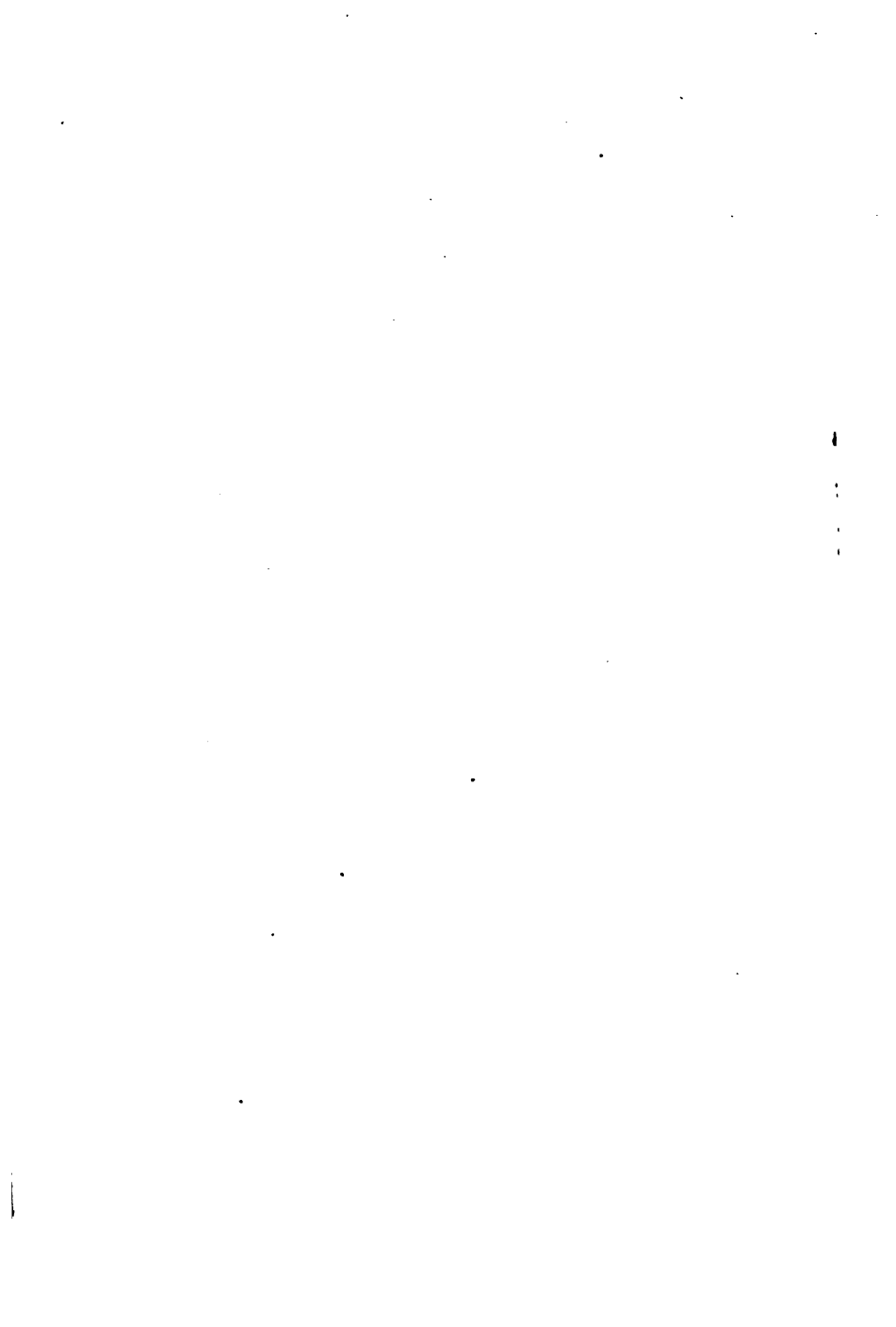


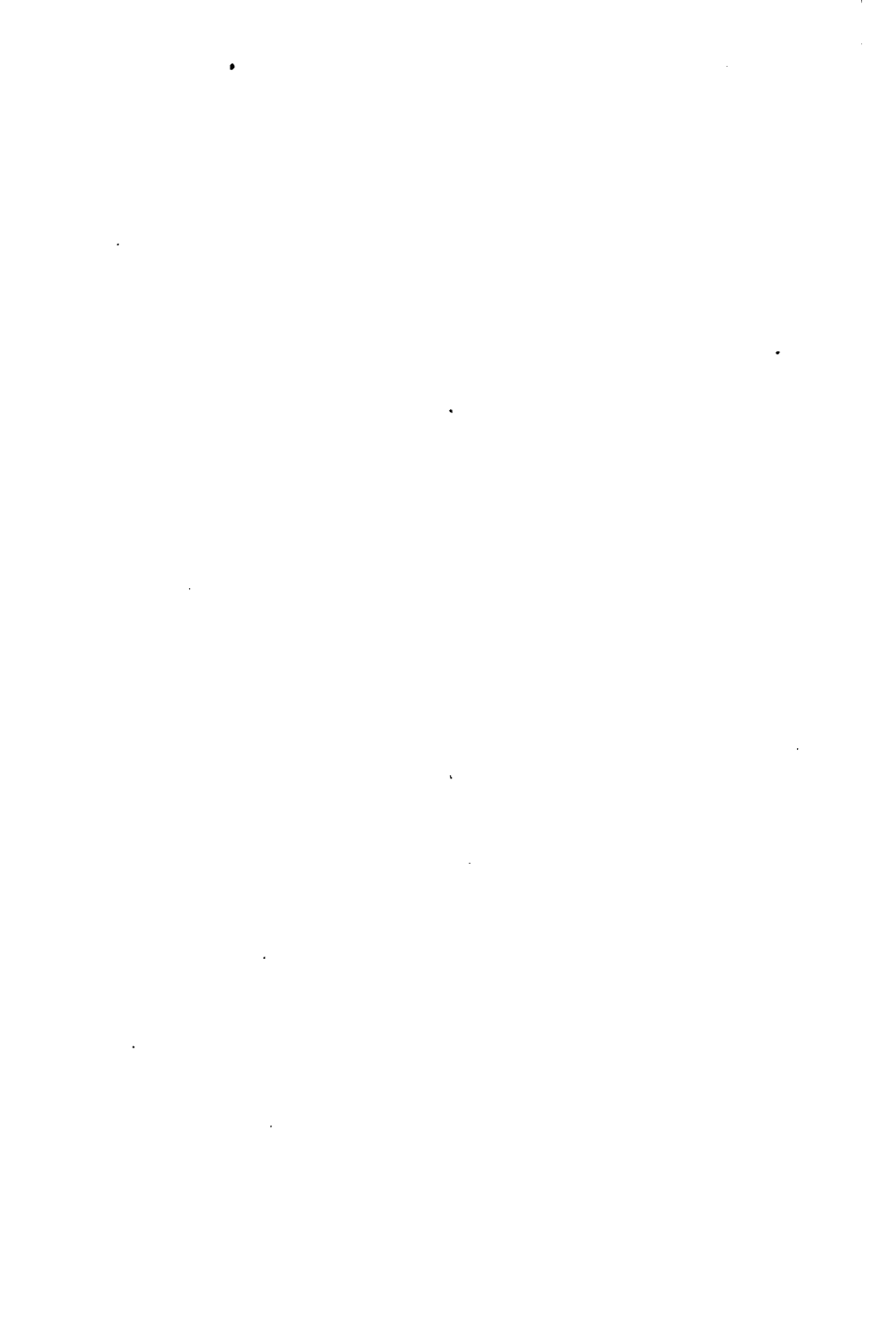
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W. B.









"WHO ARE YOU, AND WHAT DO YOU WANT?" (*Frontispiece.*) Page 36.

MIRABEL'S ISLAND

By

LOUIS TRACY

AUTHOR OF
THE WINGS OF THE MORNING,
THE SILENT BARRIER, A SON OF THE IMMORTALS, ETC.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
WILMOT LUNT



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MIRABEL'S ISLAND

CHAPTER I

THE CASTAWAY

WHAT was that?—Land? or did Death scowl in such guise from the midst of tempests?

The man rose stiffly. His body was worn and spent, but its weakness was still subjugated by a strong soul. Clutching the tiller with benumbed fingers, he cleared a mist of spindrift and foam from his bloodshot eyes with the free hand. Around him snarled and raged a yellow-maned sea whipped into frothy madness; in front lay a ruin of spars, cordage, and flapping canvas; low above raced black storm-clouds in chaotic fury. But he had vowed he would not yield until he fell, and he had kept his vow during a night that told of eternity. Now the day was here. Through the wraiths of scud he thought he had seen something—something! Could it be land?

A great wave sprang at the dismantled cutter as though urged by a demon's knowledge of that

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blurred vision, and eager to crush the life out of the man before he could determine whether or not he had seen aright. He braced his feet against the side-walls of the well, and the blow smote his oil-skin with the loud crack of a heavy whip, while tons of water pounded ominously on the deck. He heard, without flinching, that appalling sound—half sob of despair, half grunt of rebellion—uttered by honest timber under the duress of a strain to which it is unequal. He knew that the yacht was water-logged, and might dive headlong to the depths when it sank into the trough. But he only held his head the higher, to take advantage of the upward lurch as the cutter rose sluggishly on the back of its enemy; and again he swept the salt spume from his eyes.

Yes—he had not been mistaken. One of the group of small islands dimly seen to westward at dawn—whether dawn began five minutes or an hour ago he knew not—now lay almost ahead. Mechanically, he changed the cutter's course a couple of points to port. The foresail still held—all that was left of the trim canvas—for it seemed as if some monster of the deep had sheered away jib and topsail, main-yard and boom, and started the rounded bows so badly that the vessel's fore part was full of water. Yet the mast and foresail tackle were spared, and to that small mercy the yacht owed steering way. Otherwise she must have broached to and filled a thousand times during the night, nor could her

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owner have made that desperate fight for life—made such a fight as few men have ever made.

Then the cheated wave roared past, and the little ship sank wearily into the churning hollow, and the man looked gray death squarely in the face. Still the yacht swam on, with the dogged valor of all inanimate things, and Death itself must have changed its frown to a derisive grimace, for what hope of succor could be wrung from gloomy crags scoured by a pelting sea?

The man spoke aloud. It was a relief to hear his own voice, though in that din of wind and water a trumpet-blast would scarce have carried beyond the bows.

“You have five minutes’ grace at the utmost, Davie, my boy,” he said. “You can choose between being battered on a rock or going under with the *Fire-fly*. . . . Well, the rock for you, sonny! A rock offers a million-to-one chance; the sea, none. . . . Perhaps you may not be given a choice. Anyhow, be ready!”

Some men are born to command. When among their fellows, they lead; when peril must be met alone, they marshal the forces of the soul.

All night long David Lindsay had been fighting a rearguard action against pursuing seas scourged to frenzy by an equinoctial gale; now the dawn had brought a forlorn hope, and with fine courage he mustered the last remnants of his strength for a crisis which apparently could have only one issue,

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and that through the narrow gate of death. That is why he spoke aloud—why he called on his cohorts as though he were not one man but a hundred.

After peering intently into the tormented vista ahead, he prepared for the struggle. Taking a small flask of brandy from a pocket of his oilskin—where happily it had reposed untouched for months, in view of just such an emergency—he gulped down the last mouthful. He replaced the stopper with a care that was grimly humorous in the circumstances, pocketed the flask, and then divested himself of the heavy coat. It had well served its purpose. Without its friendly aid he must certainly have perished hours ago from exposure, for the bitter wind would have driven a million arrows through his skin; nor could he, unless thus protected, have withstood the continuous buffeting of broken seas. Even now he contrived to clasp it loosely across his shoulders, in such wise that he could discard it instantly if a leap for life came within the wide bounds of a doomed man's last effort. Then, making the most of the growing light, he endeavored to read the signs of the danger-zone into which the *Fire-fly* was being hurried by wind, wave, and tide.

He saw now that he was already abreast of the southerly extremity of a long, narrow island, of which a lofty peak, capping its northern half, had alone been visible earlier. It was not a large place, perhaps a mile and a half in length, and its narrowness was suggested by the absence of other high-

THE CASTAWAY

lying ground than the rock crests above the eastern shore line. Beyond, and equally inhospitable in aspect, were other smaller islands, some mere gaunt rocks. Extending far to seaward on the right, and apparently barring the way in front, ridges of flying spray showed clearly that reef after reef lay between the island and its northerly neighbors.

Some knowledge of the general features of the Western Isles told Lindsay that his frail fortunes depended wholly on the existence of a channel between cliff and reef. It was possible, even probable, that ages of warring tides had thrust a deep-water passage of a sort through the opposing barrier at that spot. Of course, such a channel might be studded with rocks, but his slender chance of salvation lay there and nowhere else. If the cutter did not sink beneath his feet, he might be able to win the comparative shelter of the island's northerly spur, and endeavor to run ashore. In two or three minutes, so fast was he driven by wind and current, he would be carried beyond even this bleak haven, which looked so desirable now to one in his dire predicament. He could discern no opening in the white clouds torn from off the reefs by the ever-growing gale, but he murmured a few words of prayer and steadfast trust, and boldly steered the drowning *Fire-fly* for the junction of rocky shore and storm-beaten sea.

The next couple of minutes passed like some stupefying and ill-remembered nightmare. Rocks

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there were, black and ruthless, now laid starkly bare in their clinging garments of shells and seaweed, and now smothered a fathom deep by swirling torrents. He saw them, as a defenseless man might see great beasts prowling by night in the jungle, and he strove to avoid them with an eager zest from which all bane of fear was banished by the ardor and fire of effort for dear life's sake. Once, twice, three times, when the dying cutter seemed to lurch hopelessly into the clutches of one of these dismal monsters, the capricious sea snatched her up in mighty embrace and flung her bodily out of reach of the waiting jaws.

It seemed to Lindsay, watching this sport of Titans in curiously detached mood, as if those ancient enemies, rocks and sea, were testing their skill on his tiny craft, and thus far the sea was winning. After the third and narrowest escape, he fancied that the rocks became fewer; but the *Fire-fly* was in no fit condition to serve as shuttlecock in a game between the elements; she was sinking now in dead earnest.

As well as he could judge, for his endurance was at an end and his sight was failing, the northern tip of the island was not a hundred yards distant, and he leaned against the tiller with the last flicker of consciousness, the last ounce of strength. He did not know then that the land, by lucky hap, curved away rapidly to the northwest, and that in consequence every foot gained on the new course brought

THE CASTAWAY

increased shelter from wind and sea. But he had suddenly become blind and deaf. His lips moved in broken supplication to the All-seeing, the All-wise, but they uttered words of no meaning. He was not even sensible of a natural feeling of anguish; though, having achieved so much, it might be deemed hard and cruel that he should collapse in the very instant which demanded the maximum of effort. Some shred of memory, some prompting of a bold heart, caused him to shake his shoulders free of the oilskin. Then he felt the cutter bump heavily, and a black shape, solid and unmoving, stood before his waning eyes; he made the mad jump for which he had nerved himself during that horrible rush across the reef; his feet seemed to touch the earth again, and he clutched wildly at the dour obstacle which barred the way.

The impact against the rock jarred the remnants of his senses out of him, and he fell like a log, with his feet lapped by the tide at its full flood, and his head and shoulders nestling into soft, snug shingle.

.

He lay there until aroused by that which he took for the barking of a dog—a sound so intimate and homely that in moments of distress it ever vibrates in the ear of civilized man a chord of confidence, a promise of help. And, once he had risen to his feet and stretched his limbs, even taking a deep breath or two to assure himself that no ribs were broken,—

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in fact, once he was sure of life,—David Lindsay took quick strides towards complete recovery.

He was young, and strong, and splendidly vital. Beyond the few sips of brandy in the flask, no food or drink was attainable since he had dined the previous evening. An all-night vigil with Death crouched at his elbow had taken the place of sleep in a comfortable bunk; but a man who had gone through a protracted campaign, and was noted as a hunter of big game, needed little else than that interval of utter oblivion and rest to win back his faculties, almost in full measure.

He was undeniably hungry, and his mouth and throat were parched from the spray swallowed with every inspiration during the greater part of the night. But these physical evils were trivial. He had been snatched by a miracle from the swirling waste of waters, and knowledge of that stupendous thing came swiftly and overwhelmingly.

It took him, perhaps, a minute to order his mind and ascertain that he was uninjured, save for many bruises and some slight abrasions of the skin. His first collected glance was at the *Fire-fly*, lying crippled and inert on the shelving beach where he had flung himself ashore. Her stern was wedged between two great bowlders, so it was evident that the little vessel had floated gallantly to the last, and had only escaped being smashed to matchwood on the reef by the accident of jamming between rocks as she was drawn seaward by the falling tide.

THE CASTAWAY

Then he looked inland, and was instantly conscious of a feeling of blank surprise. He accounted for it later by his expectation of being hailed by some island fisherman, perhaps a gnarled and weather-beaten Scot, who would address him in Gaelic. Yet, after a moment's scrutiny, the place struck him as uninhabited, save for a group of shy Highland cattle now eying him from the shelter of a grassy cleft a few hundred yards away. At any rate, there was no sign of man or dog—though he fancied he had heard a dog barking—had even persuaded himself that it was a small dog.

A rough plain, littered with rocks strewn on patches of wiry grass, crowned a low cliff and rose at a gentle gradient till it merged in the buttresses of the precipitous hill which had been his beacon during that last amazing half-hour at sea. Near the shore, and somewhat to the left, were a few crofters' huts, but so obviously ruined and untenanted that he hardly gave them a second glance. Although he was standing on the northern end of the island, it was undoubtedly its lee side. The one-time inhabitants would surely have built their houses on the least exposed site, and the unpleasant conviction was borne in on him that he had been marooned in a spot where rescuers might not reach him for weeks, if not for months.

A man of less experience than David Lindsay could not have arrived at this disheartening conclusion so readily. The presence of cattle, com-

MIRABEL'S ISLAND

bined with the certainty that the island could not be far removed from Mull and the mainland of Argyll, might have reassured a novice. But this stalwart castaway knew that the denizens of such places had a sixth sense in prescience of a wreck or of a visit by strangers. Had there really been people on the island, they would have been waiting on the beach to drag him and the *Fire-fly* high and dry when the yacht struck. No; he must have mistaken the flapping of canvas for the barking of a dog. A man hovering on the borderland of insensibility is subject to strange imaginings, and even now the wet sails cracked like pistol-shots in every furious gust. Besides, here he stood in his right mind, keenly alive to every sight and sound, and there was neither man nor dog to be seen or heard.

His next action was well calculated to alarm any suspicious watcher who might be lurking in one of the ravines that scarred the hillside. He went to the yacht, opened and stooped into a hatchway facing the well, and lifted out the body of a man.

There could be no sort of doubt that the man was dead, for mere loss of consciousness differs from death as the sleep of life differs from the repose of the grave. Moreover, this man had been slain by a murderous blow which had shattered the top of the skull. The corpse was clothed in a sailor's uniform. The yacht's name was worked in discolored white letters on the breast of a blue jersey, and the white cord of a jack-knife was dyed brown in

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parts. No need to ask whence came those ominous stains; the wound gaping through the clotted hair would have answered the dread question ere it was put.

Lindsay carried the body up the beach, and laid it on the comparatively dry patch of shingle where he himself had fallen. Then he brought an oilskin coat—not his own, which was lying in the well—and covered the white face and limp figure down to the knees. The neatly-shod feet stuck out at helpless-looking angles, and their forlorn aspect seemed to annoy Lindsay, for he went back to the yacht, fished up his coat from the sump of water and small spoil of the sea which had lodged above the grating, and thus completed the shroud.

Then he did a thing which must have struck any unprepared observer as callous in the extreme. Disappearing from view in the small cabin, of which the hatch was half raised from the deck and half sunk in the well, he emerged presently with some biscuits, a tin of preserved meat, and a bottle of beer, and without more ado ate a hearty meal.

He was seated on the deck, with his feet dangling over the side, and his face partly turned to the island, so his eyes must have dwelt frequently on the suggestive outline beneath the oilskins, though he did not look in that direction more often than he could avoid. As a matter of simple fact, David Lindsay was eating from necessity, not from choice, and ever and anon his glance swept the clear, cold

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arena bounded by the hill to learn if by any chance he could be wrong in believing that he was really alone in this place with a dead man.

But he looked in vain for any sign of humanity. The cattle seemed to have accepted his presence, and were browsing contentedly higher up the glen in which he had first seen them. A few rabbits, tempted forth by the cessation of the rain which had drenched the land during the night, skipped in timid rushes from tuft to tuft near their burrows, and a multitude of birds whirled and circled in the storm, scanning the sea for its daily harvest.

The occasional lowing of the herd, the thunder of the surf, the roar and whistle of the gale, and the continuous wailing of many thousands of gulls and coots, puffins and cormorants, served only to render the island more desolate. The undertone of silence was dismal, almost unnerving. Even this hardened traveler, inured to the profound solitude and mystery of the desert, owned to the uncanny influence of the place, and ate and drank in a fever of haste to be done with an unpalatable repast.

He made an end quickly. From the yacht's cabin he procured a chart, and consulted it. Soon he was examining the features of the coast-line and checking the bearings of such islands as were in sight. Apparently satisfied as to his exact whereabouts, he took a notebook and pencil from a breast-pocket of his reefer jacket and wrote:

THE CASTAWAY

"Yacht *Fire-fly* wrecked on north end of Lunga, Treshnish Islands, during the early morning of October 15th. James Farrow killed, apparently by falling spar, but his body has been brought ashore. William Tresidder is missing since some time before midnight on the 14th. The owner, undersigned, is not injured. Send help when weather moderates,

"DAVID LINDSAY, R.Y.S."

Tearing out the leaf, he put it in the empty beer-bottle, which he re-corked securely, and threw far out into the clearest space of water he could discern.

It bobbed up again, and was carried away by a tidal current.

"The first message!" he said aloud. "I wonder how many more I shall send, and how many, if any, will be picked up?"

When it had gone, he recollected that he had given no explanation of the yacht's plight, while the death of Farrow and the vanishing of Tresidder were but lamely accounted for.

"I can supply details in subsequent messages," he thought. "Not that it matters much. I have very little faith in a bottle post in this rock-infested sea."

He looked at his watch, which had suffered no damage in its practically water-tight case, although his clothing was soaked.

"By Jove!" he cried. "Half-past seven! I must have been thoroughly knocked out when I made that last leap. I came ashore soon after daybreak."

Then he eyed the great boulder, in the lee of which he had placed the hapless sailor.

"I suppose that is the fellow I grabbed so ear-

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nestly," he mused. "Drowning men clutch at straws, and madmen at shadows. Well, I was jolly near drowned, and quite mad, so I may be forgiven my rock."

The wind caught a sleeve of one of the oilskin coats and tossed it to and fro in fantastic mockery of a man's arm waved in signal.

"Poor Jim!" he sighed. "A good, honest chap, if ever there was one. I would give——"

He threw out his hands in a gesture of despair. The mere notion of naming some big sum of money was grotesque in its folly. Money could not quicken the dead. At that moment, and on that island, all the gold in the world would have been far less valuable than the wreckage which strewed the beach. Here gold was truly dross, and firewood was better than gold.

Then he suddenly felt chilly. The food had brought his body back to its normal state. Hitherto his brain had been dominated by the one great fact that he was alive, that the storm had cast him aside as no longer worthy of its spite, but now the bruised and shivering flesh reminded the spirit that it, too, was a partner in the compact called life. He swung his arms and stamped until the blood glowed in his veins, but, physically fit though he was, he knew that he risked a serious illness if he did not change his garments. So he went into the little cabin, and when he reappeared he had the semblance of some well-dressed yachtsman who had just

THE CASTAWAY

stepped from a launch onto the landing-pier of the Royal Yacht Squadron at Cowes. His attire was spruce and complete, from natty cap to brown-leather boots. In the message committed to the sea he had added the letters "R.Y.S." to his signature as a means of identity, and any experienced eye summing him up now would not have disputed his claim to the social distinction conferred by those magic initials.

The *Fire-fly* was a roomy little ship of five tons, with a beam and lines designed for comfort rather than speed. A stout bulkhead had safeguarded the after part, and the hatch had been closed during the night, so the contents of the lockers were dry except in the lowermost tiers, which had been swamped as soon as the yacht was beached.

When his head rose above the coamings, he was almost startled by a flock of screaming seabirds that leaped into the air at sight of him. A pair of cormorants were standing on the spread-out oilskins, and one was plucking viciously at the stout cloth. Then David used words of sailor-like import, and sprang to the beach in a fury, whereupon the feathered brigands made off with an uproar of raucous cries that momentarily shut out the howling of the wind and the booming diapason of the reef.

"Evidently, my first task will be hard and bitter," he growled. "What a change from last night in the Hotel at Oban! Entertaining one's friends to pheasants and champagne at 7.30 P.M. and burying

MIRABEL'S ISLAND

one's shipmate at 7.30 A.M., with eight hours of hurricane in a dismantled yacht to link extremes! As a study in contrasts that would take some beating!"

He was no stranger to harsh death and its melancholy demands on the living, but he had never yet dug a grave, and he cast about in his mind for some suitable implement which might be found on board the *Fire-fly*. He could think of no other device than the fashioning of a spade from a pole and a piece of the planking which abounded in every little cove on the island at high-water mark. He did not boggle at the notion of committing Farrow's body to its last resting-place without delay. He was given to clear thinking, and, if ever a man might dare to read the future, he was surely justified that day in believing that he would long remain a prisoner on Lunga.

So he procured an ax, a saw, a hammer, and nails and set resolutely to work. In a few minutes he had contrived a rough spade, but some knowledge of the difficulties attending sepulture in a South African kopje caused him to experiment at once on a promising bit of sand before essaying the bigger task of making a coffin. As he feared, he struck the solid rock at the depth of a foot or less. He climbed the cliff by a steep path, and went inland some little way, but soon ascertained that the seeming barrenness of the island was readily accounted for—it was only a mass of basalt set in the sea among dozens of smaller islets. He was seriously contemplating

THE CASTAWAY

the building of a cairn when he happened to notice that the tide had receded a hundred yards or more from the yacht, and already several new patches of tolerably dry shingle were revealed.

By prodding here and there with the broken topmast, he found one spot in front of a column-like rock where gravel and pebbles ran deep. Busily plying the improvised shovel, he cleared a pit of the necessary size, though he was obliged to divest himself of boots and socks and turn up his trousers to the knees, owing to the percolation of water. But the beach shelved rapidly, and the tide would fall for another five hours, so he reasoned that the hole would empty itself sufficiently before his preparations were completed.

Well beneath the surface he made a discovery which at any other time would have been full of interest. He had followed the face of the rock in his digging, and came upon a sunken boat, its woodwork black with age, its ribs and strakes held in position solely by mortise and tenon, and its general structure betokening a builder possessing little, if any, acquaintance with malleable iron. Here, then, was a tomb worthy of a Viking!

The occasion forbade the raising of the ancient craft, since such mournful toil did not chime with the enthusiasm of an archeologist, so Lindsay contented himself with scooping out an accumulation of sand and shells. From the midst of a roll of some rotted material, which might have been fur or

MIRABEL'S ISLAND

leather, he picked three green-tarnished metal ornaments, which he threw aside on the beach after a hasty scrutiny.

As the water had ceased to flow into the pit, he went to the yacht for a bucket, and, suddenly remembering one last sad duty, sought for a prayer-book, which, to the owner's credit be it said, formed a somewhat unusual addition to the *Fire-fly's* library. Then, again driving away a dense flock of seabirds, he uncovered his shipmate's remains, and discharged the most disagreeable part of the undertaking by searching the poor fellow's pockets and making an inventory of their contents.

This done, he lifted the inert form in his strong arms and carried it to the edge of that strange grave.

Soon the coracle was ready for its latest tenant, and Lindsay laid his humble friend at rest on the floor of a craft which was probably hundreds, if not thousands, of years old.

Many times, in far wilder lands, had he heard and read the burial service under conditions that lent a dismal eeriness to a ceremony ever most solemn and depressing; but never had he been so stirred as in this hour. The frantic sobbing of the wind, the unceasing rancor of the sea, the discordant clamor of the birds, and the absence of all human companionship, tried his strong will almost to breaking-point.

He opened the book. . . .

THE CASTAWAY

“I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. . . .”

Words full of beauty and consolation—yet Lindsay’s voice rang hollow in his ears and his eyes dimmed. . . .

He felt so alone, so utterly alone.



CHAPTER II

DISCOVERIES

“Now for a pipe,” said he.

Odds and ends of timber formed the lid of poor Farrow's singular coffin; when these were weighted with stones, and the whole packed with pebbles and sand, David put on his coat, socks, and boots, and endeavored in the same breath to throw off the pall of sorrow which had enwrapped his soul.

The training of the regimental mess and the explorers' camp had not seared his finer feelings, but it certainly had taught him the folly of railing against the edicts of fate. Though he would cheerfully have risked life or limb to save the man whom he employed as second hand on the *Fire-fly*, his nature was of too strong a fiber to indulge in useless regret. Farrow had been struck down without his cognizance, and by an agency which he could only guess at. He had not shirked the labors of a sexton, but he refused to chant a dirge.

Gathering his tools and the time-worn ornaments secured from the boat, he returned to the yacht, and rummaged in the pockets of his wet coat for pipe and tobacco. Both were there, the tobacco hardly damp in its tin case, while there were plenty

DISCOVERIES

of cigars in the lockers. But his matches were in a pulp, and he realized, before a hopeless quest confirmed the belief, that the supply carried in the fore cabin, which also held a stove and some tins of methylated spirit, must have been destroyed hours ago.

Here was the first pin-prick of existence on desolate Lunga—no fire!

“Never mind!” he told himself promptly. “The sun will shine some time, and then—hey, presto!—I shall do stunts with a burning-glass out of my binoculars. But, marry-come-up, gadzooks, what have we here?”

He drew forth a gold matchbox and peered eagerly into its interior. Like all lovers of a pipe, he had long ago abandoned the dream of using the gaud for its assigned purpose. It held now a Kruger sovereign, a crooked sixpence found at Laing’s Nek, a four-leafed shamrock pent within a glass charm, five two-cent stamps bearing the bland profile of George Washington, and, snugly tucked away at the bottom, a frayed and disreputable-looking wax match.

Many a man would have hailed a rare gem with less joy.

“Rest there, ruby of price!” he cried. “I must find thee a setting worthy of thy scintillations. But I shall be wary, for methinks thou art French, and therefore fickle. So, play the man, Monsieur Vesta, and we shall light such a blaze on Lunga as shall be seen from Tiree to Argyllshire.”

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A hoarse cackle of laughter smote his ears with an insistence greater than all the artillery of the storm. He was so astounded that even his hunter's eyes roved a second or two before finding out that the scoffer was a jackdaw, perched on a stone among the herbage.

"Well!" he gasped.

"Jack!" said the bird, hopping confidently down the zigzag path.

"Good-morning, Jack!" said Lindsay.

"Fine day," said the bird, halting in front of him, and cocking an impudent and inquiring eye at the stranger.

"Where on earth do *you* come from?" demanded David.

"Mirabel," was the inexplicable answer.

"And who, or where, is Mirabel?"

The jackdaw's attention was suddenly drawn to the crumbs of Lindsay's breakfast. He uttered that sardonic laugh again, and hopped away to investigate. His plumage was smooth and glossy, but one wing had been broken in the middle of the humerus, and he had to depend solely on his legs for movement.

"You didn't fly here, that's sure, Jack," said David, who was unfeignedly glad of the bird's company. "I suppose you once were 'Mirabel's' pet, though whether Mirabel was a lady or a yacht, I don't know. Anyhow, old sport, I am pleased to see you, and I'll find you some fatted calf."

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He climbed into the cabin, and brought out a ship's biscuit and a slice of corned beef.

"Ha, ha, ha! Good dog! Carlo! Carlo!" vociferated the bird, dancing about excitedly and flapping the stump of the lost wing in unison with its fellow.

"I shall know the whole family soon," said David, breaking the biscuit into small pieces. But the jackdaw preferred the meat; when it was gulped out of sight, he sprang to the yacht's deck and thence to the top of the open hatch.

"Come out of it, you pampered rascal!" cried Lindsay, driving him off and closing the hatch. "I like people to be free and easy, but you mustn't choose your own menu. Don't you see, Jack, you and I may have to live here for weeks?—though I must admit that solitary confinement on Lunga doesn't seem to have disagreed with you."

"Oh, you naughty dog!" said the bird, and then he whistled shrilly.

Now, a man seldom implies that a dog is "naughty," but by preference emphasizes the fact with the toe of his boot; even if he uses the word, he does not give it that high-pitched stress on the first syllable often heard from a woman's lips.

"So Mirabel *is* a lady, and she has a dog named Carlo?" commented Lindsay.

"Ho, ho! Off we go; Tom, Dick, Harry, and Joe," cackled the bird, and, disdaining the biscuit, he raced up the path and in the direction of the glen.

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Lindsay was about to follow, when the inbred caution of the explorer caused him to pay out a few fathoms of chain and bury a fluke of the anchor well above high-water mark. More than once when on trek he had stalked a springbok, thinking he would be absent from camp half an hour, and had reached his wagons again next day. To-day the *Fire-fly* was his camp and Lunga his continent.

He was driving the anchor home with his heel when he saw a red eye winking at him brightly from the port light.

“What luck!” he cried, hurrying to the caboose for a tin of colza. He had passed and re-passed the yacht a dozen times on the starboard side, where the green light had given out, but had not happened to look at its companion. Carefully unshipping the lantern, and carrying it into the cabin out of the wind, he found that it still contained a small quantity of oil, whereas the starboard lamp was empty. The two facts were eloquent to a sailor's mind. It was Farrow's duty to tend the yacht's lights, and he had replenished the port cistern just before he was killed. Possibly, he was about to lift the second lamp from its screen when he received the tremendous blow that crushed his skull.

At any rate, David could now light his pipe, and with both lamps going and protected from the gale, he was fairly sure of a fire when needed.

These operations consumed fully ten minutes. When he looked for the jackdaw again that myste-

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rious visitor had vanished. He went up the glen, which seemed to offer the easiest line of approach to the hill, and the cattle drew together in a mob. They were two-year-old bullocks, and not in the least likely to be vicious; indeed, as he neared them, they turned tail and ran, bearing somewhat to the left and vanishing over a hillock.

He had not gone far before he learnt that, instead of one hill on the north part of the island, there were three, set in a row; but two were unimportant, mere humps on the shoulder of the third and most southerly, which rose well above the three-hundred-foot line. In fact, he remembered that its height, three hundred and twenty-eight feet, was given on the chart.

He saw now, as he might have ascertained earlier by close scrutiny of the chart, that Lunga held several well-concealed hollows, where grass was abundant, and in which many buildings might have been hidden. Except when actually skirting the central spine of rock, he could follow the coast-line on either hand, as the island was nowhere more than a quarter of a mile wide, while its length did not exceed a mile and a quarter. He decided to examine the east side first, and noticed, while crossing the second transverse ravine, that the western face of the hill was much more precipitous than the rugged and broken slope to the eastward, which, nevertheless, must be surmounted before the remaining section of the island came in view. Yet the cattle had gone

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that way, as he had observed when their tracks branched off; to this skilled trekker of shy game every raindrop brushed from a blade of grass, each tiny stone dislodged from its natural resting-place, was an open page in the book of venery.

At this point, too, he came upon a well, a crude thing but efficient, because he tested the water at once and found it slightly brackish, but drinkable.

Thus he wandered on, letting nothing pass his careful eyes, but often glancing at the noisy sea and wondering why Providence in its mercy had deigned to snatch him from its fury. Nor was he forgetful of his new friend, the jackdaw. It would seem that the bird, like the beasts, had chosen the alternative route, and he resolved to come back that way, and so complete the tour of the island.

Active and light-footed though he was, progress was not easy. Lunga had been built with a haphazard magnificence by the volcano and the storm, and he had to pick and choose each step after leaving the well, since there was no semblance of a path, except from the landing-place to the higher level of the island proper, and his boots were not stout enough for such rough work. At last he stood on a little plateau, bounded by a sheer cliff on the left and a steep escarpment of rock on the right. Beneath the cliff the sea pounded vigorously, for a strong ebb tide was now fighting the wind, and the waves were running higher than ever. In fact, he realized that the *Fire-fly*, quite apart from her sink-

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ing condition, had not run her nose into Lunga an hour too soon. The cutter could not have lived five minutes in the open now. The gale had flogged the mighty Atlantic into a rare fret and fume, and ever and anon a watery mass weighing thousands of tons would surge savagely up fifty feet of the rock wall, and fling its spray to such a height that it swept across the plateau in drenching showers.

To avoid getting wet needlessly, he climbed out of range, and the island spread its second panorama at his feet. A deep gully ran from east to west almost in the very center. Beyond that curiously distinct dividing line, Lunga was comparatively low-lying. In the distance, perhaps two miles away, he recognized the island of Bach Mør, known to sailors as the Dutchman's Cap, a name suggested by its conical hill rising from the midst of a flat tableland.

So barren, and desolate, and wholly deserted was the gray aspect of rock and reef in this section that Lindsay would undoubtedly have returned to the yacht by the way he had come were it not for the problem set by the jackdaw and the cattle. Whither had they gone? To decide that trivial point he pressed on.

The hill did not fall evenly towards the gully. Halfway down, it expanded into a well-marked horse-shoe, opening due south. The broken amphitheater thus provided by nature was singularly regular in its crest and inner curve, and two small hills, which

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stood somewhat to the southwest of its entrance, might have been wrenched from the complete circle by some geological convulsion.

But it was not any fantasy of the rocks that caused David Lindsay to stare and blink into the hollow like one bewitched. Tucked away down there, sheltered from every wind, yet so placed as to receive the maximum of sunshine, was a house—a well-built, habitable house!

At first sight it suggested a manse, for it resembled no other edifice so thoroughly. Scattered over the length and breadth of Scotland were thousands of its congeners—U. P. and Wee Free—with the same solid walls, the same sedate gables, the same sober, homely aspect of roof and windows. It is impossible to conceive a frivolous oriel or giddy turret in a manse, and Lindsay almost expected to see a frock-coated, clerical-hatted, benevolently severe-faced old gentleman appear on the garden path and pass with proper decorum through the half-open wicket gate.

But no such respectable vision was vouchsafed to him. Around and about bellowed the gale, overhead flew wild-fowl in their wildest flight, and below, in staid seclusion, solemn as a stone owl, stood the silent and apparently tenantless house.

Though smoke did not curl out of any of the chimneys, the place wore a smug aspect of habitation. A wicket gate standing ajar, and the presence of three milch goats, with as many kids, surreptitiously de-

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vouring some growing vegetables within the inclosure, undoubtedly helped this conceit. David, eager for human companionship, soon put the matter to test. He ran down the steep slope and entered the garden. First, he obeyed the law of nations by chasing out the thieves; then he knocked at the closed outer door of a porch.

There was no answer, though he waited patiently and rapped loudly enough to wake the Seven Sleepers.

As there was no help for it, he had to be rude, and glued his nose against a window-pane. He peered into a spacious kitchen; it was fairly well equipped, but empty and fireless. On the other side of the porch was a sitting-room, comfortably furnished. Both apartments had the general air of the house—surprise lay only in the fact that they were deserted.

He looked long and closely for external signs of possible occupants, but the paths were made of pebbles and flints, and the deluge of rain during the night had scoured them thoroughly. It did not escape him that the goats' tracks on two small patches of soil were fresh. True, they could just as easily have leaped the low wall as entered by the gate. But why on that morning only? He suspended judgment, but he frowned in thought. At last, hardly imagining that there could be any result save one, he grasped the old-fashioned sneck on the door. Lo, the latch lifted and the door opened. A

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second door yielded as readily, and he stood in the kitchen. Then Lindsay knew that he was not alone on Lunga, for the room was warm. Crossing to the hearth, he felt the stone; a fire had been lighted there during the morning, and he fancied that its embers had been hastily thrown aside, as a big kitchen shovel, which stood near a pile of logs, bore traces of having been used for the purpose.

"Anyone here?" he shouted, and his voice rang hollow through the silent rooms. An open door led to a scullery, and, probably, to a larder, but the second door was locked. The door of the sitting-room was also secured, as was another door, which, in all likelihood, provided a draught-screen for a staircase. He banged heavily on the panels of this last door, and called again, loud and insistent.

"The place is empty," he admitted finally. "It seems to say: 'Come in, if you want shelter, but leave the inmates alone. They know you are here, and don't wish to make your acquaintance. . . .' Well, well. The inhabitants of Lunga must be suffering severely from the hump! . . . By gad! I wonder if they will respect my vested rights in the cutter! Perhaps I had better mount guard."

Without another glance at the house or its contents, he hurried out, but, true to his original intent, followed the westerly side of the island.

The way, though steep, was really less difficult. Some effort had been made to cut a path among the rocks, and, if David climbed higher, he advanced

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more rapidly. He noticed a giant of a rock which was separated from the mainland by a narrow chasm hardly ten feet wide, yet more than a hundred feet deep, as he could tell by the din of a tidal race booming up through the cleft; but he was now all an eye for aught that moved, and he gave no heed to a natural phenomenon which would otherwise have proved irresistible. His keen hearing was of no avail in that war of wind and wave, but never a white-tailed rabbit bobbed into cover, or tall fern-frond swayed in the gale, but he noted it. He missed nothing, either at his feet or on the skyline, and thus it came to pass that, when he was crossing a small gully where the rain had gathered into a miniature rivulet, he saw a footprint in a little drift of sand.

It was clean, well-cut, and recent as his own might have been had he stepped in some such place during his passage along the east side. He looked around sharply, to make sure he was not being watched from some crag or cleft. Gray rock, wind-swept undergrowth, stormy sky, and lowering sea made up the whole of the picture, and the only living things in sight were the rabbits and the sea-fowl.

Yet here was a footprint, a child's or a woman's—a neat, well-molded sole and broad heel—and, by the side of it, scarcely legible, owing to the thinning of the sand on a smooth slab of rock, the pads of a dog—a small dog!

Lindsay knew his "Robinson Crusoe"—there was a copy of that immortal book on board the *Fire-fly*

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at the moment—and he remembered how the cast-away “stood like one thunderstruck,” or as if he “had seen an apparition,” when he found “the print of a man’s naked foot on the shore.” Indeed, he had often wondered by what jugglery one solitary print, as insisted on by Crusoe, could have located itself on a sandy shore, a circumstance so truly amazing that the worthy mariner of York himself accounted for it, at first, by imagining that the Devil had done the thing to plague him.

But David had no suspicions of the Evil One’s agency that morning. Even if an up-to-date Satan wore boots he would surely display a larger foot. Where was the wearer?—that was the puzzle, and David at once set his wits at work on its solution.

The existence of a dog told him so much! One, or more, of the dwellers on the island knew that he was ashore, and had taken pains to remove evidences of a fire having been lighted should he chance to discover the house. Probably he had been spied on ever since he was roused from the stupor of exhaustion by the dog’s barking. He had been seen burying poor Farrow! Did *that* explain the inhumanity of any Christian being who could witness a shipwrecked man carrying a messmate’s body from the yacht—though himself obviously in utmost need of succor—and yet be so callous as to remain aloof, uncaring, unsympathetic? David was not prone to forejudging others, but the reflective frown on his brow deepened, and he felt that, if ever an ex-

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planation were forthcoming, he would give it a cold hearing.

From the farther side of the little ravine he saw the cutter and the whole of the northern fore-shore. To his right, where the watercourse broadened into a pasture, the cattle were grazing. There was no one visible—that part of the island afforded hardly any cover, unless a spy was lying full-length on the grass behind a boulder—so he resolved instantly to adopt a trick known to every scout and shikari. As soon as he had made certain, with sidelong glance, that he was well over the shoulder of the hill, he ran swiftly up the first gully that offered. Then, choosing a promising cleft branching to the south, he climbed steadily up until he could just peer through a tuft of rock heather growing there. He lay at a comfortable angle, and waited. Hidden himself, he surveyed the greater part of the western coast-line; if he was being tracked, or followed, the next move rested with the spy.

He had not long to wait. Indeed, scarcely a minute had passed before he received the surprise of his life.

From a recess in that great rock beyond the chasm rose a woman, or rather, a girl probably yet in her teens, as David could see in the clear, steel-gray light which now made all things so vivid. Instead of the coarse homespun dress and plaid shawl of the Scottish fisher-folk, she wore a serviceable and stylish coat and short skirt of dark tweed, such as may

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be seen by the score on the moors any day during the shooting season. A true Highland touch was given to a brown Tam o' Shanter cap by an eagle's feather set jauntily on the left side, and, lest the astounding vision should be incomplete in any detail, the young lady not only held a black Aberdeen terrier on a leash, but carried a double-barreled hammerless gun.

"Mirabel and Carlo—ten thousand pounds to a potato on the double event!" breathed Lindsay. But he did not budge. Enforced residence on Lunga had suddenly become exciting.

He watched the girl's proceedings with a breathless interest that did not lack a spice of fear—in her behalf,—for she laid the gun aside, drew a long plank from a crack in the rock, bridged that awesome canyon with it, picked up gun and dog, and crossed to the mainland, though she had to lean well against the wind to preserve her balance. After one glance at the crest where Lindsay's figure had disappeared so recently, she pulled the plank in, hid it in another crevice, and, still keeping the dog on the leash, sped lightly on David's trail.

At any other time he would have admired the graceful activity of her movements, for she leaped from rock to rock like a chamois until she reached the rough path, but her motive in thus secretly and furtively stalking him was so hard to read, or even guess at, that the problem stifled all other thoughts. And again, what would she do when she discovered

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that he had not gone to the yacht? Would she search the hillside warily, and find him crouching on his ledge.

"By gad!" he muttered, "I hope she will not shoot at sight! She handles that gun as though she could hold it straight if need be."

But help came from an unexpected quarter. Girl and dog were speeding up the incline—and David saw that the terrier had been cleverly muzzled with a bit of rope—when a loud laugh rang from a rocky pinnacle above the ravine in which Lindsay was concealed.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a voice. "Good dog, Carlo! Wow! Wow!"

The girl stopped.

"Oh, Jack, you bad bird!" she cried. "How you startled me!"

"Now is my chance," thought David. He thrust head and shoulders well in view, and lifted his cap. "Good-morning, madam," he said, disregarding the instant blanching of the girl's face when she looked up at him. "I hope you will forgive me for appearing in this fashion, but it is hardly my fault."

He smiled, for it seemed incredibly stupid to charge this fair creature with the cold-blooded barbarity he had alleged in his mind against the inhabitants of Lunga. But no answering smile relaxed her drawn features. He remembered afterwards that she did not appear to be afraid. Rather was she stanchly scornful; her eyes gazed into his

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as if the sight of him was intensely disagreeable, almost odious.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" she demanded, and her well-bred accents fully accorded with her appearance. Truly, this bleak island was beginning to reveal marvels.

"My name is David Lindsay," he said, meeting her steadfast glance with quiet good-humor. "My cutter was cast ashore here soon after daybreak, and I had no option in the matter. What I wanted then was merely to save my unworthy life. What I want now is to convince you that I have no felonious intent, such as you evidently credit me with, judging by the businesslike way in which you hold that gun."

At that, she softened somewhat, and the forefinger of her right hand clasped the grip of the stock instead of resting on the trigger-guard.

"You seem to be speaking the truth," she said coldly, "though you looked a very different sort of person when you—when you came ashore. You were not alone?"

"No. Unfortunately, one of my men was killed by the collision which disabled the yacht, and the other was swept overboard. At least, I suppose so. I cannot be certain, as I was fast asleep in the cabin when the affair took place."

She hesitated perceptibly. Each moment she was becoming more and more convinced that the intruder on her domain was a gentleman. But she had the upper hand of him, and meant to keep it.

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“Come down to the path,” she said, with a fine air of command. “I must have some proof of your statements, and please believe that I can use a gun as well as carry one.”

“Phew! What a spitfire!” thought David.

But he obeyed, and soon they were standing face to face, though parted by some few yards, while the dog, freeing himself with an unexpected jerk, leaped up at David in a friendly manner, and the jackdaw chortled strange sounds from his perch high above their heads.



CHAPTER III

WHAT THE NIGHT BROUGHT

LINDSAY felt that he was being eyed critically, and he felt, too, that the girl was rather at a loss how best to obtain the "proof" she spoke of. The gale was not to be denied, for its undiminished vigor was blowing her hair into her eyes and pressing her skirts tightly around her ankles; the wrecked yacht and David's presence on the island came within that category of evidence which, in courts of law, is styled "undisputed"; wherein, then, lay the germs of doubt?

In truth, this Diana of the Isles had seen fit to adopt a strange attitude, and Lindsay thought it would help if he brought an enforced acquaintance to a commonplace level. He stooped and patted the dog's head.

"Carlo takes me on trust, at any rate," he said. "I rather fancy it was he who roused me——"

He stopped abruptly. The girl's face, mobile and expressive beyond the ordinary, betrayed a new terror that astounded him.

"You know my dog's name?" she almost gasped.

"Yes, and yours, too, I believe. If this is Carlo, surely you must be Mirabel?"

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He allowed some hint of vexation to creep into his voice. This picturesque young lady was carrying things with a high hand. For the life of him he could not imagine what he had said or done that her eyes should dilate and her very lips whiten.

"I refuse to exchange another word with you," she said tremulously. "If you want food, I will supply your needs. You can come here at mid-day, and you will find some milk, and bread, and meat. For the rest, you must keep to the north end of the island. Do not dare to approach my house. I am well protected, as you will learn to your cost if you annoy me. Come, Carlo!"

The dog went to her, and she walked away rapidly, leaving David dumfounded. He did not stir, but watched her graceful figure as she bent against the wind and climbed the ravine in which he had found her footprint. She did not look round to ascertain what had become of him, and the last he saw of her as she sank below the skyline was the tip of the eagle's feather and the barrels of the gun swinging on her shoulder.

Then he turned and gazed blankly at the jackdaw, which had hopped down from the spire of rock and stood jauntily near him.

"Ho, ho! Jim Crow!" said the bird.

"It's time you acquired some new rhymes, my dusky poet," said David. "Try this:

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“She hath a way,
Anne Hathaway,
To make grief bliss, Anne hath a way;
But who can tell
Why Mirabel
Should fume like this—Ah, who can tell?”

The bird sharpened his beak on a stone, and an odd notion rose in David's mind.

“You are far more sociable than your mistress, Jack,” said he. “Come with me to the *Fire-fly*, and I'll cram your maw with potted beef.”

Having a capture in mind, he tried to entice the bird to peck at his hand, but the black bead-eyes were alert, and Jack skipped out of range, making off after the girl with long jumps and cawing derisively, or so it seemed. Then Lindsay hit on a better plan than that of turning the jackdaw into a postman. The imperious tenant of the island said she would bring, or send, a quantity of eatables to that same place at noon. Well, if she declined to talk, perhaps she might be willing to read, so he strode off to the yacht and wrote a letter, tearing another leaf out of his notebook for the purpose. He had no better writing materials, because the yacht had run out of notepaper and envelopes, and a fresh stock was awaiting her arrival at the port she was apparently not destined to reach.

“Dear madam,” he began, though he hung a full minute on the “dear,” but ultimately held to it as strictly conventional.

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" Dear Madam:

"To avoid misunderstandings, I wish to make the following statement: I have told you the literal facts about myself and the *Fire-fly*. I learnt your name and that of your dog from an affable jackdaw. I shall be glad to have some milk, if you can spare it, but I have plenty of food. When the weather moderates I purpose building a fire, or flying a kite, or both, in order to signal to Mull or a passing vessel. Meanwhile, unless forced by some imperative reason which I cannot foresee, I shall not trespass beyond the lacteal frontier. With apologies for my existence, I remain,

"Yours faithfully,

"DAVID LINDSAY."

Having constructed a tripod of timber heavy enough to withstand the pressure of the wind, he folded the strip of paper, addressed it "Miss Mirabel," and tied it to a leg of the tripod, which he carried to the "frontier," and fixed in such wise that the girl could not fail to see. It pleased him to fulfill the bond by not even pausing to scan either the hillside or so much of the path to the house as was revealed from that elevated spot. He would have liked to examine the chasm which the girl had crossed with such disregard for its nightmare depths, but it lay within the forbidden territory. Having settled the tripod securely, he returned to the yacht, lit his pipe, and sat down to ponder the extraordinary developments of the past hour.

He was not impressionable where women were concerned; he had a shrewd, well-balanced brain, in which much knowledge of the world's ways was vivified by a sense of humor. His natural irritation

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at the girl's eccentric behavior soon yielded to its ludicrous aspect.

"The lady is alone on the island, I take it," he mused. "Moreover, she is determined to remain alone. Why? Her appearance clashes with her intent. A woman does not look her best when under the stress of strong emotion, but I happened to take Mirabel unaware as she was hot-foot on my trail, and I don't think there is a prettier girl in all Scotland. As a general rule, pretty girls don't elect to winter on uninhabited islands; but this one is an exception. She is established here. The weather has been fine during the past three weeks—confound it!—and there must have been scores of fishing boats in these waters every day, so she could have got off to the mainland at any time before to-day. In that case, Davie, my boy, you showed a wily guile in telling her about your signaling devices. She won't like *that* notion. Now, I'll make a bet with you. Two cigars to a dry pipe after luncheon that she demands a parley when she brings the milk."

He lost the bet, or won it, whichever way it may be taken, but the net result was that he compromised on one cigar, for he fetched a can of goat's milk about half-past twelve, and the unopened note was still tied to the tripod. Then he said things, using language not fit for a tripod to hear, because it did really strike him as unreasonable that two human beings should be compelled to inhabit one small island on such unneighborly terms.

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It may be doubted if David would have blazed into wrath had Mirabel been an elderly and be-whiskered Scot, whose chief motive in withholding the hand of good fellowship from a shipwrecked man might center in the threatened depletion of his winter's store of food. But Lindsay's angry mood melted before the necessity for the hard work that must be done during the few remaining hours of daylight. The wind was colder, and had shifted a couple of points to the southwest. There was every promise of more rain. Dark clouds were piling up in the weather quarter, and the aneroid barometer in the cabin had fallen again after rising slightly during the morning.

In order to snatch a comfortable meal he had taken shelter on board the yacht, and the temptation to curl up in a warm, dry bunk gave the strongest of hints that he must not yield to the blandishments of tired nature, or he might awake when it was too late to save the *Fire-fly* from almost certain destruction during the next tide. So he bathed his aching eyes with a little of the milk, and resolutely set about those measures which experience deemed necessary.

His first task was to fix a block and tackle to a rock and adjust a chain and rope in such manner that he could get a pull from the toe of the boat when it lifted under the incoming tide. Then he fashioned four rollers, placed one beneath the keel well forward and tied the others loosely in the style

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of a rope-ladder, so that they would not be washed out of position before the hull rested on them.

Luckily, the cutter was built on seaworthy lines. Her centerboard was of the fan type, and packed up snugly amidships when not in position; otherwise, she would not now be lying fairly upright on the shingle, nor could she have escaped being dashed to pieces when first taking the ground.

He had barely finished these preparations when the rain came in a deluge, but he was well protected by oilskin, sou'wester, and long seaboots, and he had to wait patiently for an hour or more after daylight failed before the *Fire-fly* began to rock and strain in the heavy seas creeping over the reef.

Even with the assistance of the pulley and the driving power of the advancing waves it was no light task to haul a five-ton cutter up that sloping beach. He toiled manfully until he was as wet with perspiration as he had ever been from salt-water. Foot by foot, the *Fire-fly* drew nearer high-water mark, but the changing of the rollers more than once exposed him to real peril. Although the cutter was ashore on the only protected part of the island, the after part was often swept by heavy seas, for the gale was still increasing in violence and the rock-broken channel between Lunga and the nearest small islands was now a boiling, howling vortex of heavy breakers. A ghostly yellow light was reflected from the churning sea, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he could judge when to risk a rush alongside

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to the stern in order to free the lowermost roller and yet escape being caught and swept off by the undertow.

During the previous night he had had to endure the scourging of the Atlantic passively; now he was called on to fight, to use every atom of strength, to strain each sinew almost to breaking-point, yet to remain cool and observant and take no hazard that did not promise real achievement.

By half-past six he found he could not budge the *Fire-fly* another inch. It seemed to him that the tide had then reached its maximum, and he felt fairly confident that, with double moorings, his little ark was safe.

By that time he was utterly spent. Heedless of the pouring rain, he sat on a bowlder to restore his exhausted energies by a few minutes' rest. Of course, the yacht would be high and dry ere he retired for the night, and all that remained to be done was to change his clothing again and eat a substantial meal. There was no hurry. He was thoroughly fagged out, and he sat there with his chin propped on his clenched fists, gazing out at the watery Inferno which he had cheated and dimly aware of a heartfelt thankfulness that he had been spared to make that strenuous battle.

The noise of the storm was stupendous; it seemed, if such a thing were possible, to grow louder as the night grew darker. He could not tell which was the most overpowering—the continuous bellowing of

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the gale, the crash and roar of the sea, or the unceasing rattle of the pebbles, which churned back and forth in distinct waves of their own as each mighty comber swept up the beach and shattered itself on the rocks and shingle, yet retaining venom enough to recede in a foam-flecked wall.

Through all this harsh din sang the deep notes of wave-swept caverns and the drumming of breakers against the cliffs. Lindsay had been at sea in many a fierce gale—he had listened to the boom of the surf on the West African coast, and had yielded to the awe of a springtide bore on the Yang-tse-kiang,—but he had never heard such a chorus of elemental forces as chanted in frenzied discord that night on the shore of Lunga.

It was impossible to detect any ordinary sound. A battery of the biggest ordnance yet devised by man might have been fired on the other side of the hill, and Lindsay would have remained deaf to its thunder, so it was not surprising that he should have failed to detect the approach of a slim figure that hurried down the path from the raised floor of the island.

For a few seconds the girl, cloaked like David himself in an oilskin coat, and with a sou'wester firmly tied under her chin, did not see him.

She believed, in fact, that he was on board the cutter, but, once she had reached the lower level of the beach, her eyes were so familiar with every rock in that small space that she soon discovered him.

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Whatever her purpose, she did not falter. Had he not been quite exhausted, he must have known of her presence, for men who have lived in the wilds gain new senses of sight and hearing; as it was, she was standing by his side and her hand had touched his shoulder before he realized that he was not any longer alone.

He started, rather more nervously than might be looked for in one of his strong physique.

"Hello!" he said, looking up at her with uncomprehending eyes. Then his bemused brain cleared itself magically for a few seconds, and he stumbled to his feet.

"Sorry," he said. "You took me by surprise."

She could not hear a word. The exigences of the moment obliged them to bring their faces close together.

"You cannot stay here to-night!" she cried shrilly.

"I shall be all right on board the cutter," he replied.

"No, no. . . . You must come to my house. . . . I apologize. I read your note. . . . I have been horrid."

"Impossible, little plum! . . . Hard-hearted and huffy, if you like, but you couldn't be horrid!"

He was surely light-headed, or he would never have spoken, or shouted, such a bizarre disclaimer. Yet this strange girl did not shrink, but grasped his arm compellingly and led him up the steep slope

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without another word. He did not resist. He had almost reached the limit of endurance. The long-drawn torture of the night, added to the immense exertion entailed by the safeguarding of the yacht, was now telling its tale on mind and body. Moreover, once the two had gained the higher ground, they were exposed to the full fury of wind and rain, and David never afterwards remembered one step of the half-mile walk to the house. He hardly knew where he was going. He felt, with a numb confidence, that the girl was holding his arm and guiding him. Often he stumbled, but she was amazingly strong and active, and never ceased to urge him onward, for she feared lest he might fall without power to rise again, and then she would have been at her wits' end to get him to the shelter of the house.

At last he understood vaguely that the clamor of wind and sea was abating, and through the darkness a big, square, yellow eye gleamed comfortably at him. Their feet crunched on a path softer and smoother than the uneven rock, and a dog barked. Doors were opened, and David lurched into the well-lighted kitchen. Carlo danced around in noisy welcome, and the jackdaw, perched on the back of a high chair, cackled his approval.

"Good for you, cocky!" mumbled David. "Here we are again! All the happy family gathered in the manse!"

"Please sit down, and don't talk," said a soft voice at his ear. He turned and gazed at the girl

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as though she were some pleasant and unexpected vision. But he obeyed, and allowed her to place him in the chair, from off which the bird sprang with a loud "Ho, ho!"

She closed both doors, and instantly the outer uproar fell away to a murmur. A kettle, suspended on a "reckon," was singing cheerfully over a log-fire, and the hostess, throwing aside her heavy wrap, took a bottle from a cupboard and mixed a steaming tumbler of whisky and hot water.

"There," she said, "drink that, and you will soon be yourself again. Then we must get that coat off, and your boots as well."

"I'm awfully sorry——" he began.

"Don't talk, but drink," she said.

"The best of toasts," he muttered, and swallowed a mouthful. He blinked at her and smiled genially.

"Do you know," he said, "that you are the queerest girl I've ever met?"

She put a finger on her lips—such firm, red lips, now that they were not bloodless.. The warmth and shelter of the room after the outer buffeting had brought a rush of color to her face and she looked exceedingly attractive.

He seemed to remember that her eyes were blue, but now they were violet. Why was that? He nodded, in a puzzled way, and half emptied the glass.

"Can you eat something?" she asked anxiously.

"A little *potage à la Reine*," he said, lifting the tumbler as if he were drinking her health.

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She laughed, but instantly became serious again.

"I have some Scotch broth, if that will do," she said. "It will be ready in one minute. While it is heating you must get rid of the coat. . . . There! . . . Finish the whisky. I don't like the smell of it, but Donald says it is innocent of the King's taxes, whatever that may mean."

She bustled about in true housewifely style while she spoke, and soon had a pannikin nestling among the burning logs. Then she helped to divest David of his oilskin, made him sit in another chair on account of the rainwater which had poured off him when they entered the house, and, protecting her hands and dress with a towel from smears of dubbin, had pulled off the first of his heavy seaboots before he could frame a protest. Nothing could have restored him to a normal state so speedily as that simple action.

"Oh, I say," he broke out, "I can't permit that!"

"And I can't permit argument," she retorted. "I have often done it for my father, and your boots fit more loosely than his. Next, please! . . . Now, some slippers. They are in front of the sitting-room fire."

He heard her go out, and the jackdaw, who was dozing on one end of a low, crescent-shaped iron fender, suddenly woke up and whistled.

"Words fail you, eh?" said David. "I am not surprised, oh, dusky fowl!"

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"You—really—must—not—talk," came the quiet command, staccato, from the girl. "When you have eaten and rested—perhaps. Here are your slippers. I hope they'll fit. At any rate, they will serve for to-night."

Lindsay was beginning to resent the absurd weakness which had seized him; he was on the verge of explaining that he would return to the *Fire-fly* within fifteen minutes when it occurred to him that the girl was making amends for the earlier lack of hospitality, and it would be churlish to cavil at her efforts.

So he accepted the slippers, and took the soup and bread she placed before him on a small table. Long ere the meal was finished he was himself again. He knew that his companion was scrutinizing him with an odd mixture of concern and wonder in her eyes, so he resolved to make an end speedily of a situation that must be fraught with a good deal of difficulty for her.

While he was wondering what to say, and how best to say it, she gave him a cue.

"I have plenty of bread and cold meat," she explained, "but I don't think you ought to eat a full meal if you have been starving."

He laughed then, with such cheery good-humor that the jackdaw joined in and had to be sternly repressed by his mistress. Lindsay pulled out his watch and consulted it.

"My dear young lady," he said, "I am here un-

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der false pretenses. Though involuntary, they must cease to exist, so I purpose giving myself the luxury of exactly one quarter of an hour's chat with you. I am not weak from want of food. By the time I leave you I shall be fully able to go back to the yacht unaided. I don't think I would have thrown up the sponge at all if it were not for the immense surprise of finding you standing by my side, down there on the beach. You see, a man is a good bit of an automaton when you come to analyze him. He can hold out indefinitely on a dull round of effort, but is liable to be upset by the least shock or jar. He may have run twenty miles at a jog-trot, and be good enough for an extra mile, or even five, but give him the least little push and over he goes, without another kick in him. It is an odd thing, too, how the mind and body affect each other. I was utterly worn out—'all in,' as the Americans say—when you showed up, and my poor little brain said to my tired limbs: 'Look here, you've kept me busy too long—I don't feel equal to polite conversation.' So it gave up the struggle."

"Yet my chief trouble has been to keep you from talking," said the girl quietly.

"My earlier remarks were the gabble of dementia. I don't recall a word of them."

"You said nothing so very far-fetched. Do you remember that I told you I was sorry for having misjudged you when we met this morning?"

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“Did you?”

David glanced around the cozy kitchen and waved a comprehensive hand.

“For any imaginary debt incurred by you I have been repaid a hundredfold,” he said. “I might even question the original obligation. I took you by stealth—played a trick on you—and you had the right to resent it.”

“The trick would not have been effective but for my own eagerness to see what you meant to do,” she said.

“I can quite credit that. You moved over those rocks like a fawn—an island nymph, shall I say?—so it is evident that you have lived in the open more than most girls. Now, before I go, may I gratify a pardonable curiosity?”

He thought he saw again in her eyes the flicker of fear which he had caught at their first meeting. She was standing somewhat in the shadow, as the only lighted lamp in the room had a storm-proof cover and its radiance was focused in a spreading circle that left walls and ceiling dim. But her features were full of expression and her eyes mirrored every thought. No school of manners had yet taught her how to say one thing and think another.

“I only want to ask if you are really living here alone?” he continued.

“Yes.”

The answer came with a curious readiness, and

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he felt absurdly grateful for the knowledge that—no matter what the true cause of her anxiety—she was not afraid of him.

“But you mentioned the well-founded views of a gentleman named Donald,” he said.

“Oh, Donald?” she cried. “Donald is a fisherman—a friend of mine. He keeps an eye on me and brings stores from the mainland.”

“Weather permitting.”

“Exactly. It may not permit now for six weeks.”

“What?” he almost shouted.

She stooped rapidly, picked up his seaboots, and ran to the door at the foot of the stairs.

“We can discuss the position of affairs fully in the morning,” she said, smiling with serene indifference. “You will find a fire and light in the sitting-room, and there are plenty of blankets piled up on a big couch. A sleeping-suit and some of my father’s underclothing are airing on a chair in front of the fire. They are dreadfully old, but that cannot be helped. I suppose you know how to extinguish the lamps—just press the side levers downwards. . . . Of course, it is quite too absurd to think of your going to the yacht in a storm like this. Good-night!”

And she was gone, gone with his boots!

Even while he was still twisted round awkwardly in the chair, and gazing blankly at the closed door, he heard her quick, springy tread overhead, followed

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by the click of a lock and the dumping of the heavy boots on the floor.

Carlo and the jackdaw had taken things for granted—they were sound asleep already; so was David, within ten minutes.



CHAPTER IV

EXPLANATIONS

LINDSAY slept the sleep of a just man tired; indeed, he came within a rarer category of righteousness, for his liver was clean and his digestion excellent, and these gifts of the gods, which are part and parcel of sound sleep, are denied to some just men. He had, too, the veldt habit of awaking with each sense alert, and his first glimpse of unfamiliar surroundings told him that he was conscious and not dreaming.

The couch on which he found himself lay beneath the window, which, it will be remembered, faced south, and his brain began to measure an angle of light on the opposite wall. A hasty calculation brought him to his feet with a bound, and he consulted his watch in the despairing hope that his estimate of the time might be wrong.

“Nine o'clock!” he growled. “I’ve lain there like a hog for twelve solid hours. Now, what will that blessed girl think? She has been up and about since daybreak, for sure.”

A slight rattling of crockery came from the kitchen; then he knew that a similar sound had roused him. There was no means of washing in the

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room, so he opened the door a few inches and stuck his head out.

Mirabel, wearing a businesslike Holland apron over her dress, was laying the table for breakfast. She smiled in the most friendly way.

"Good-morning," she said. "Did I disturb you? I gave you the round of the clock, and would have called you in another five minutes."

"Please may I have my boots?" he said meekly, when Carlo's welcoming bark was silenced.

"Why?"

"I see two cups and a vast number of plates, so I assume your renewed hospitality; if I had my boots, I could be back from the cutter in half an hour——"

"Your belovèd cutter must carry a cargo of diamonds. . . . You will find a bathroom upstairs—turn to the right—second door on the right. . . . How long will it take you to tub?"

"Two hundred and twenty seconds."

She was puzzled for a moment; then she laughed.

"You needn't be so precise," she said. "I am going to the well; that takes twenty minutes. When I return, there is the kettle to boil and the bacon to cook, so you have heaps of time. Do you like tea or coffee?"

He thrust his head a little farther through the doorway, but he had to be careful, for the sleeping-suit supplied by his hostess had been made for a man six inches shorter than himself.

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"Coffee, please—and—look here, Miss Mirabel, or rather, don't look, but listen," he began. "By the way, that *is* your name, isn't it?"

She blushed slightly, but nodded a "Yes."

"Well, then, I'm not going to trespass on your good-nature. Dumping diamonds on this island would be worse than carrying coals to Newcastle, but I have plenty of supplies on board the *Fire-fly*——"

"Oh, we can compare stores after breakfast! I——"

She stopped suddenly. Though the wind was still howling dolefully, they both were aware of a series of ear-splitting shrieks outside the house. These alarming sounds were followed by shouts of "Hello!" "Naughty dog!" "Mirabel!" "Oh, I say, Mirabel!"

The hubbub seemed to come from some point beyond the garden wall, and the girl hurried to the porch, throwing over her shoulder the explanation:

"That is Jack. He is being chased by a fresh eagle, I suppose."

The jackdaw hopped in, heralded by fierce gusts. He was wildly excited, and danced about the room, screaming and voluble until his mistress picked up a stick.

"Did you say a *fresh* eagle?" demanded David gravely, when the noise had subsided.

"Yes," and the girl laughed again.

"The word has various meanings. It might indicate a casual eagle as opposed to an old stager,

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or, colloquially, an eagle that was giddy, frivolous, bald-headed with dissipation.”

Mirabel took a sou'-wester from a hook and began to tie its strings under her chin.

“In this instance,” she said, “it refers to an eagle which has not tackled Jack before. Eagles often fly over from the mainland, and invariably they look on Jack as an easy meal until they hear his voice. Then they recollect an urgent engagement in Mull. . . . Now, twenty minutes——” and she was gone, carrying two pails.

“I have begun the day well,” mused David, as he climbed the dark stairs. “I have learnt an interesting fact in natural history, and discovered that a sou'-wester is a most becoming head-dress.”

He entered the bathroom, which was simply but adequately equipped. A porcelain bath was half filled with salt water, and a large can of hot water stood in a washbasin.

“The third item in the morning's reflections is almost an epigram,” he said. “It should read, ‘When you are shipwrecked, choose your island carefully.’”

He looked through a little window, partly opened, and saw Mirabel climbing the shoulder of the hill whence he had first set eyes on the house. She took the steep slope with the swinging stride of the mountaineer, and he noted the spring of her instep as she rose from ledge to ledge of rock and shale.

“Most decidedly,” he said—with wise wagging of

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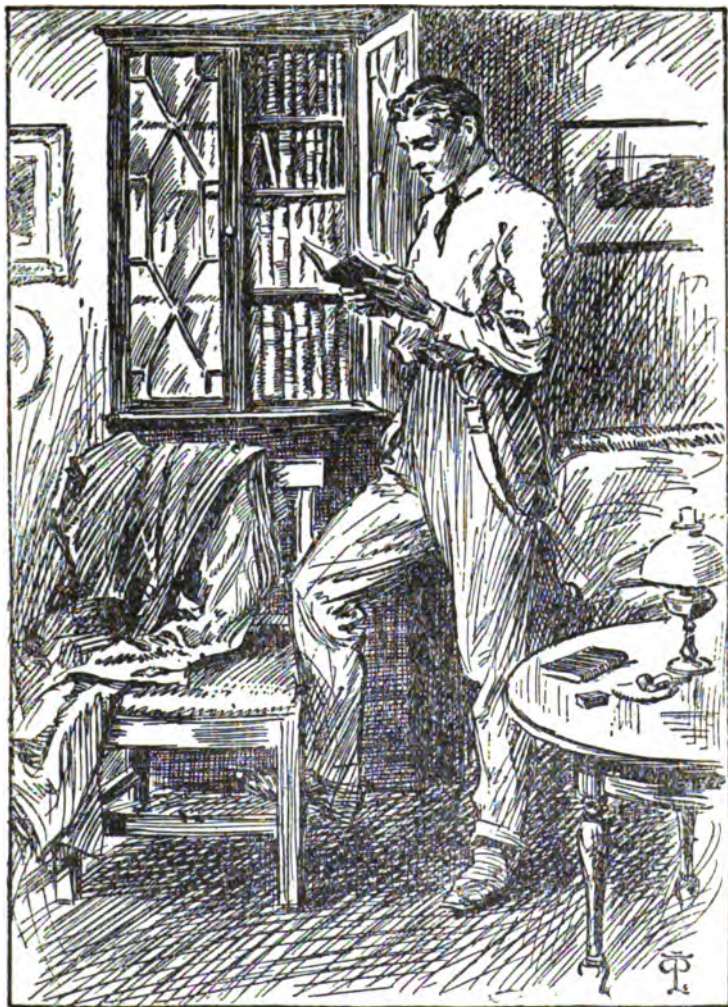
head and pursing of lips—"pick out the right island and there you are, don't you know."

For once in his life, being master of many servants, he "tidied" the bathroom before leaving it. While dressing in the room beneath, his inquisitive gaze rested on a bookcase. He recognized some old friends—a Pentland edition of Stevenson, a set of Scott, and the "Century" dictionary, but among some smaller fry he caught sight of a thin, leather-bound volume which evoked curiosity, because an intelligent man can hardly become the owner of a bibliophile's library without catching some taint of the collector's mania.

"Of course," said David, "it is impossible."

To prove "its" impossibility, he opened the glass doors and drew forth the tome. And there, on the title-page, he found: "Virgillii Opera. . . . Apud Elzeverios. . . . Leiden, 1636." He could scarcely believe his eyes, so he turned to the exquisitely tooled cover, where the "solitary" device of Bonaventure and Abraham Elzevir stared at him. There could be no manner of doubt as to the genuineness of the work. The mark—an elm tree, a fruitful vine, and a man, with the motto "Non solus"—bespoke a veritable product of the most famous partners of a famous family of Dutch printers; in the elegance of design, "face" and regularity of type, and quality of paper, each page was eloquent of a great period in the history of printing.

David had never before seen an Elzevir of that



HE OPENED THE HIGH GLASS DOORS AND DREW FORTH THE TOME. *Page 60.*



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date. His own library contained an Amsterdam "Corpus Juris Civilis" and a copy of the New Testament in Greek; but this!—why, this duodecimo was worth many times its weight in gold.

Almost by accident, so absorbed was he in the typography, he glanced at the flyleaf. It bore a name, "John Alex. Forbes," and a date, twenty-five years old, underneath the words, "Harvard Univ." So this precious volume had crossed the Atlantic twice, to nestle at last in a hiding-place on remote Lunga. He laughed at the oddity of it all.

"Yes, Davie," he said, as he closed the bookcase, "everything depends on your selection of an island. But there are infallible guides to the observant. Your island must loom unknown out of a storm, preferably on the west coast of Scotland, and it must contain a cheerful jackdaw, a friendly dog, and the prettiest girl——"

His communing was broken in on by the click of the sneek. The door creaked, and a rush of wind shook the house, solid though it was. Mirabel had returned.

Her cheeks, browned by the salt air of Lunga, were russet now, not only from the whip of the gale, but because of the exertion of carrying two zinc buckets filled with water from the well, which was fully four hundred yards distant and separated from the house by very rough ground. Her eyes sparkled; her curved lips were open, revealing her strong, white teeth; her hair, brown in some lights, spun gold in

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others, peeped forth in irregular strands from under the oilskin cap; and her breast rose and fell with each long-drawn breath. Lindsay, who knew something about training, saw the muscles on the slender arms taut as whipcord beneath her dress, yet there was no bending of the knees nor arching of the supple frame. She was in true athletic trim, and would have made no ado had it been necessary to carry the laden buckets round the circuit of the island.

"You found the bathroom, I see!" she cried, setting the pails under a kitchen table that stood close to the wall beneath the window. "You have no idea how funny you looked, poking your head round the corner of the door. Of course, the pyjamas were too small for you—I hope they were not too tight!"

This species of badinage was the last thing Lindsay expected, and straightway it drove certain mad notions from his brain, for some quaintly incongruous personal facts had chosen that inopportune moment to transfix him with lightning-like darts; for instance, he was twenty-six, unmarried, and the owner of a great estate. He even had a vivid recollection of a gray-headed solicitor peering at him one day over gold-rimmed spectacles, and saying, "It is high time you were thinking of settling down, Sir David!"

He strove now to fall in with the girl's merry mood.

"The cords stretched," he said.

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"My arms have stretched, too," she confided.
"Are you a handy man with a saw and a chisel?"

"I have spoiled a lot of good wood in my time. My last effort at carpentry was"—then he lied glibly, remembering what task that last effort had dealt with—"was the building of a dog-kennel."

"Oh! What sort of dog?"

"A pointer. But hadn't you better inquire what sort of kennel?"

"I am sure you are clever. That tripod idea was cute. But you might contrive me a milkman's yoke. It would come in so handy for bringing water from the north well."

"I'll try. But, while I am one of the population of Lunga, I shall take care that you fetch no more water. Have you no nearer supply?"

"Donald dug a sort of trough at the mouth of the cave in the Dorlin—a deep trench that runs across the island a few yards southward of this house,—but a silly bullock fell from the rocks the other day and broke his neck quite close to it—the trough, I mean. The birds are eating him, and fight dreadfully over the feast, so the whole place is in a litter. I don't like to go too near until—until the bones are nicely picked. But how did you learn the island's name?"

"From the chart."

"Ah, of course! How stupid of me!"

While talking, she was filling a kettle and cutting bacon and generally bustling around like an

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experienced housewife, but Lindsay caught a defiant uplifting of her chin at some thought suggested by her question and its answer. He could not see the expression on her face, but he recalled that same little toss of the head at their first meeting when she had threatened him with pains and penalties if he dared follow her, and he was beginning to like it.

"May I help?" he asked, while she was throwing some small wood on the fire to create a blaze.

"Can you make toast?" she demanded.

"Like a first-rate parlor-maid."

"Then you will find a loaf in the pantry—that door there——" and she pointed. "The toasting-fork is here, hanging on a nail."

"I know where the pantry is. I examined it yesterday."

"So you came into the house?"

"Not without knocking. I even saved your vegetables from the goats."

"Did you guess that there was someone on the island?"

"I was sure of it. I felt the hearthstone—it was warm."

"That was sharp—yes, that was Indian."

"But I had heard of you already."

"How?"

He was in the tiny passage at the back, and hidden from her, but he caught the note of anxiety in her voice, and wondered.

"You forget that I had gossiped with the jack-

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daw," he said, bringing the loaf, which was of the home-made variety, baked in a shallow iron pot with a close-fitting lid, on which burning turf or charcoal may be heaped to secure an equable distribution of heat.

"You didn't know that Lunga was inhabited, then?" she cried quickly.

"I had never even heard of Lunga. I had noted the Treshnish Isles on the chart, but I could not have named any single island of the group, to save my life."

"Are you a stranger in these waters?" she inquired, with a shy, pleased glance that led him to see how her eyes grew violet when in shadow, but were blue as myosotis in a strong light.

"I had never been farther north than Oban before I was brought here by wind and tide yesterday."

"How lucky you were to escape—to live through such a sea in a dismasted yacht!"

"I am just beginning to appreciate the full extent of my luck."

"And you are burning the toast."

It was true. David was watching Mirabel rather than the square of bread impaled on the prongs of the fork.

"Please, mum, the parlor-maid's deputy is sorry, and will eat this piece himself," he murmured.

She was stooping near him now, holding a long-handled frying-pan and deftly turning rashers of

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bacon. A subtle odor of Parma violets came from her dress, and, by an odd trick of memory, the fantasy recurred which had caused him to address her as "little plum" when she came to the beach on the previous night.

"By the way, is your name Forbes?" he inquired politely.

"No, it is not. You know my name, my Christian name, at any rate. Will not that suffice?"

"Fully. Of course, you remember that my name is David."

"Yes, Mr. Lindsay. I wish you would mind that toast."

"Permit me to explain. I am not being rude intentionally. A few minutes ago I happened to notice a book in the other room, and, to my very great surprise, found that it was a rare and beautiful Elzevir. A name was written in it, and a date, and, as the name was Forbes, I allowed myself to fancy that your father owned it. I envy him, I assure you, though it is sufficiently amazing to find in such a place as this a Virgil that is worth—at the least computation—two hundred and fifty to three hundred——"

"Oh, will you stop?" she almost screamed. "Take this pan, or I shall drop it!"

Now, David, kneeling before the fire, was attending to his duties with proper zest, and when he looked up he was astounded to find the girl's eyes suffused with tears, while the corners of her mouth drooped.

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pitifully. He was on his feet in an instant, and had snatched the frying-pan from her hands.

“My dear young lady,” he protested, “I would not on any account have said anything to hurt your feelings. What a blundering fool I must be! But do credit me when I say that I was only expressing the enthusiasm of a book-lover—and—and—the scent of violets reminded me of the South of France—and then—your name, too—Mirabel, you know——”

She dried her eyes resolutely in a corner of her apron, and took the pan from him. Happily, he did not guess the ridiculous figure he cut with the frying-pan in one hand and the toasting-fork in the other, his face all wrung with anxiety, and broken words bubbling forth.

“If we go on at this rate, we shall have frizzled bacon for lunch and no breakfast at all!” she exclaimed, with a queer little catch in her voice that was half a sob and half a nervous laugh. . . . “There! The kettle is boiling! Do you mind lifting it off? Take that duster, or you may scald your fingers. . . . Will you fill the coffee-pot? It is a crude way to make coffee, but I have no cafetière—not here.”

David obeyed in silence, and she turned aside to dish up the bacon. He had never before been so perplexed by the sex, not even on a memorable day in the Market Square at Johannesburg when he knocked down a drunken Boer who was assaulting a

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woman and was promptly attacked by the portly vrow herself for his brutal behavior to her husband.

Mirabel faced him with a real society smile, and pointed to a chair.

"I think we can make a start now," she said. "If you are as hungry as I am, we can finish on cheese. Cheese is awfully nutritious, but you must chew it well."

"I am glad that the rain has ceased," he said, taking the plate she offered him. He looked studiously at the table, but was well aware that she had given him one of those soul-piercing glances which he was willing enough to provoke.

"You needn't be huffy because I wept," she said. "I couldn't help it for the moment. You will understand when I tell you that my father is blind. It is the sorrow of his life that he can never again read his dear books."

"Good Lord!" gasped David, though he availed himself to the full of the obvious privilege of examining Mirabel's eyes. She smiled wistfully.

"You need not gaze at me—I haven't taken to spectacles yet," she said. "My father met with a dreadful accident years ago, soon after I was born, and his sight has been failing ever since, but I notice that people always look at my eyes when they hear that dad is blind."

"I can quite understand that," said David.

"How much sugar in your coffee?" she inquired,

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suddenly alive to the fact that they were looking earnestly at each other.

“Two, please. . . . That reminds me of a rather neat reply made by a lady on the afternoon steamer between Folkestone and Boulogne. Her husband had ordered tea for the pair of them, but was absent when the steward brought the two cups. ‘Does the gentleman take sugar, mum?’ he asked. ‘Perhaps he doesn’t want the tea now,’ she said, ‘though he told me he was going to search for a missing wrap. Better leave a couple of lumps in the saucer.’ I and another fellow happened to be standing near, and we grinned, because her dressing-case and other belongings were painfully new.”

“I don’t see anything to grin at,” said Mirabel, round-eyed with inquiry.

“Well, it’s an antiquated joke, I admit.”

“What joke? Was the poor man ill?”

“No. He came back soon afterwards. I was alluding to the difficulties of the newly-married in domestic matters. The bride almost invariably trips on her hubby’s taste in sugar.”

Mirabel blushed to the roots of her hair; but seemed to feel in the same breath that she must explain her confusion.

“We have forgotten the porridge!” she cried. “It is cooking in that small pot there”; and she rose to rescue the utensil from a corner of the hearth.

David was abashed. He feared lest she had found

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some personal application in the story—which, just because such a wretched jest was possible, was the thing farthest from his thoughts, his real intent being to twist the talk from the unhappy turn it had taken.

“Oh, I am a special sort of ass,” he communed bitterly. But he said aloud:

“Let us substitute porridge for cheese. I believe that we order our meals wrongly in many ways. It is supposed to be a hygienic blunder to begin a dinner with soup. Why should porridge take precedence of bacon?”

“We are sticklers for old habit in the Highlands,” she said.

“How well I know it! During the advance on the Modder River, when we had to crawl like lizards to dodge the hail of bullets, two lanky Scots petrified the Boers and ourselves by dropping their rifles and starting a stand-up fight. And what do you think the row was about? One was a Macgregor and the other a Macnab, and the Macgregor had expressed a doubt as to whether a Macnab could really belong to the Clan Alpine.”

“The Macgregor was mistaken,” said Mirabel seriously. “My father’s mother was a Grant, and she could tell you every family of the Siol Alpine. I am sure the Macnabs were in her list.”

“Have you studied Highland genealogy?” asked David, with some awe.

“A little. I can recognize each tartan at sight—

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not the tailors' patterns you see in Edinburgh shops, but the real thing."

"What a solace for the weary you would have been during the advance on Kimberly!"

"Why? Were you in a Highland regiment?"

"No. I was a mere worm, an Imperial Yeoman, but my knowledge of the *taal* secured me a staff appointment, and my name was a passport to the inner circle."

"What inner circle?"

"The great Scottish hierarchy—the hardy men of the North, whose bodies may cross the Tweed but their hearts never."

The girl's fine eyes glistened, and she favored Lindsay with an approving smile.

"That has the right sound!" she cried enthusiastically. "I was beginning to think you were trying to be funny at the expense of Scottish sentiment."

"Heaven forbid!" he exclaimed. "I have taken some hazards in my time, but I draw the line there."

Then, despite his disclaimer, and prompted by the desire to see once more that half-startled, half-shy, but wholly adorable inquiring glance of hers, he said solemnly:

"While on this topic, may I ask if you know why St. Andrew became the patron saint of Scotland?"

"Of course. His relics were brought miraculously from Constantinople to St. Andrews."

"Pardon me. That legend is responsible for au-

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ocracy in golf. The real reason is that St. Andrew was the Apostle who discovered the boy carrying the loaves and fishes."

The shaft succeeded in its object, but Mirabel bounced up indignantly.

"I believe you are little better than a Sassenach," she declared. "Let me see if you know how to eat porridge."

Yet David, in his heart, guessed that she had not a drop of Highland blood in her veins, or, if that assumption was wide of the mark, her ancestry was undoubtedly of that Scottish-French strain which sprang into being during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Pride of race gave no sure test. He was acquainted with families of clear English descent whose Scottish domicile conferred both accent and lineage.

Moreover, there were strong hints in this delightful girl's manner and speech which spoke of a widely different parentage. That entry in the Virgil, "Harvard Univ.," seemed to supply a faint clew, and she had used one word, "cute," which was far removed from the language of the Western Isles, while "Indian" was an uncommon simile for a display of scout-craft. Her Christian name, too, was oddly at variance with her environment. Again, why had she chosen such a marvelously suitable perfume as an extract of Parma violets? In Grasse, or Rosières, or Cannes, Mirabel and the scent of violets might dwell in subtle harmony, but in Lunga,

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with Tíree to the west and Mull to the east, they were—not out of place; the notion was anathema—but strange, elfin, the very warp and weft of fairy romance.

And what could one say of the kith and kin who permitted her to remain in solitude on this lonely rock? What manner of people were they? He pictured to himself the incredulous guffaws with which the story of this adventure would be received if he told it in a London club. Not that he would dream of telling it. He reddened at the notion. To cover his self-consciousness, he poured some milk on the plate of smoking porridge Mirabel had given him, and looked vacantly round the table for sifted sugar.

The girl clapped her hands in triumph, whereat Carlo barked and the jackdaw cackled: "Hello! Hello! What's up?"

"I knew it!" she cried. "You are no true Scot! You eat porridge like a Londoner!"

"One would need to be a salamander of fable to eat this," he vowed, profoundly thankful that his reverie had been attributed to any cause save the true one.

"I use salt, of course," she said. "If you want sugar, you must stir in a lump or two while it is hot. I have no other in stock. When we come here in June we bring all sorts of luxuries, but I—that is, supplies are limited till Donald pays me a visit."

Notwithstanding his earlier mistakes, David felt now that he must put a pertinent question.

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"I have no wish to pry into your affairs," he said, "but it would be folly on my part to pretend that your presence in this desolate spot is a natural and probable circumstance. I gather from what you have told me that your relatives, your friends, live here during the summer. Why are you alone now?"

He looked her straight in the face as he spoke, and again she tossed her head as though a rebellious strand of hair had fallen across her eyes.

"Because I choose," she said defiantly.

"That is a woman's reason."

"It is the only one I shall give."

"I have asked you for the last time, Miss Mirabel. It is no business of mine, and I am profoundly grateful for all that you have done for me. But a man is apt to blunder and miscalculate where a woman is concerned, so I hope you will not fail to warn me if any thoughtless words of mine lend themselves to misconception on that score during the few days I may be forced to remain here."

"Do you speak from wide experience of women, Mr. Lindsay?"

"No, I have little or none. I lost my mother when I was a boy of ten, and I have been a wanderer in silent lands since I left Oxford."

"Silent lands!" she repeated, with a glint of merriment in her eyes that promised forgiveness of his prying.

"Till yesterday," he rejoined. "And now, after we have tackled our porridge *à la mode* Lunga, may

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I invite you to come with me on a tour of inspection? On board the *Fire-fly* there are odds and ends of eatables and drinkables which should gladden your hospitable heart. And we ought to discuss ways and means. A hungry man is a formidable addition to your household, even for a brief visit."

"This is the commencement of the equinoctial period," said she calmly, "so, as I said last night, you can make up your mind to enjoy life on Lunga for a fortnight, at least, or it may be much longer."

"Linger longer Lunga, in fact," he laughed.

"Yes. Donald is weather-wise, and when he left for—for Mull—four days ago he said I might not see him again till the middle of next month; but he will come at the first opportunity, and then you can sail away. As for me, if I am given my heart's wish, I shall stay here till the birds come back in the spring. They are going now. This gale will sweep them south in myriads, but I hope to greet them again at nesting-time. I am happy on Lunga—too happy, I fear,—but I shall cling to my dear island until I am torn off it. That rings queer and mad in your ears, I have no doubt, and, just like a woman, I have answered your question after saying that I wouldn't answer it. . . . Have you ever known porridge remain hot so long?"

"It is in the fashion—it has time to burn, as they say in New York," said David. "But does it matter? There is no hurry. He was a placid man who first called porridge 'hasty pudding.'"

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Mirabel nodded gayly at the quip, and David indulged in a day-dream of which the main theme was that the present equinox would create a record for boisterous longevity. The gale was still whistling round the eaves—good luck to it!



CHAPTER V

THE GIFT OF TONGUES

DAVID took for granted a tacit compact that they should have their meals in company while he remained on the island, so he insisted on doing the washing-up.

The girl refused his aid at first, but he urged the experience of many camps, and she yielded. She brought his seaboots to the pantry, not without a quiet eye for his character as a scullery-maid, which emerged spotless from the ordeal. Only when he came to pull on the boots did he discover how thoroughly they had been rubbed with dubbin, and again he growled at the exhaustion which had kept him asleep during so many hours.

He was ready for their ramble before Mirabel arrived downstairs again, and was on the point of going outside when he chanced upon a definite clew to his hostess's recent history.

Behind the exterior door of the porch was a barometer. He had not noticed it on entering the house the previous day, because his mind was bent then on the essential feature of his quest—was the place tenanted? Now it stared at him, challenged his observation.

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The mercury had risen since last the pointer was set, but it was not anxiety as to weather prospects that stayed David's feet. A neat card nailed on the wall showed that Mirabel had taken a record that morning: the prior readings went back twice daily for five days; then came a gap; between September 2 and October 11 the atmospheric vagaries of Lunga passed unheeded.

It annoyed him to find that he was acting unconsciously as a detective, so he returned to the kitchen and called up the stairs:

"Is smoking permitted, Miss Mirabel?"

"Anywhere, at all hours," came the reply. "There are cigars in the cupboard under the bookcase. Dad smokes all the time."

David filled his pipe. Strive against undue analysis of the facts as he might, his brain persisted in fitting into their position on the chessboard of events the pieces of this island problem. The girl seemed to have no hesitation in speaking about her father; why, then, was she moved to tears by that unhappy reference to the Elzevir? And "all the time," while sufficiently good English of the familiar sort, struck him as having crossed the Atlantic with the Virgil.

Suddenly David rapped his head with clenched knuckles.

"Idiot!" was the best he could say of himself. "Her mother's name was Forbes—some Scots family connected with Harvard, and the Elzevir is an heirloom. Naturally, the daughter would retain a few

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slight Americanisms acquired by the mother, who may have been born in the States. I rather like the lilt of them on Mirabel's tongue. They add piquancy to her speech."

At that moment David hardly realized how many admirable traits he had found in Mirabel. Perhaps such probing of his feelings might come too soon—or too late.

When the girl reappeared she was dressed exactly as when first he saw her. Carlo barked joyously, evidently regarding the Tam o' Shanter cap as a sign of a prolonged prowl among the island's nooks and crannies. Lindsay experienced anew a whiff of that surprise which had assailed him with the unheralded vision of Mirabel crossing the chasm. Mere man may miss the glories of a Paris gown, but he is a connoisseur of a woman's sporting get-up, and this young lady's coat and leather-bound skirt were faultless in style and cut; deny it who may, beauty unadorned is wise when she employs a good tailor.

"If I were a budding artist, I would paint your portrait in that costume," he blurted out.

"Do you like it?" she said, with naïve simplicity. "My father has excellent taste in colors, and he chose the cap to match the cloth. It is a comfy rig, though rather shabby and faded after a long summer in sun and spray. Oh, of course, you don't understand"—for the blank bewilderment in her hearer's face told its own tale—"dad isn't really quite blind. He can see fairly well in strong sun-

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light, but he is compelled to wear the bluest of blue glasses—almost black, they are. And he cannot read, except, perhaps, the biggest and blackest of print.”

No tears in those pretty eyes now—not a hint of sorrow in her voice; but Lindsay was growing wary; he steered her thoughts back into the safer channel of art.

“I can see that picture in my mind’s eye,” he said. “I would entitle it, ‘A Highland Chieftainess’——”

“But, in that case, I ought to have three feathers in my cap,” she broke in.

“It would be a whole bunch in mine—if I were a painter.”

She took an alpenstock from a corner—the gun of yesterday was not to be seen—and flashed an amused glance at him.

“I think you are paying me compliments—a sinful waste of time. Will you credit it?—I have never so much as set eyes on a photograph of myself.”

“But why? You have not lived always on Lunga.”

“Dad dislikes photographs, especially of people. He agrees with the Mohammedans, though not for the same reason; he thinks that photography is lifeless, inartistic—flat, he terms it. All the same, I have sometimes envied nice pictures of other girls in photographers’ windows, but I could never per-

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suade my father to let me see how *I* would look in a frame."

"Has he absolutely forbidden it?"

"No—not exactly—just pooh-poohed the notion—but I obeyed his wishes, of course."

"There is a camera on the yacht. As soon as the sun peeps out again, let me try my skill."

"Oh, that would be delightful! Will you please take a few pictures of the island? I can show you some beauty spots, barren as it seems."

"Appeal to Apollo—command me."

"Apollo is thinking about us. The barometer is rising steadily."

"So I noticed a few minutes ago," said David, taking the plunge.

They were in the porch, and their eyes fell simultaneously on the chart. Mirabel said nothing, but Lindsay dared another step.

"You make neat figures," he said.

"And you are a most persevering person," said Mirabel.

Then they faced the gale, and connected talk became too difficult. David fancied they would head for the yacht, but the girl led the way straight to the south, and, after a few yards of up-and-down progress over rocky ground, they stood on the brink of the Dorlin, that natural hollow which Mirabel had spoken of. It cut a broad trench from east to west, slightly above high-water mark, and the low level gave instant shelter from the gale. On each

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side roared the sea, now at half ebb, and consequently fighting the wind with added fury, and, when they stood at the bottom, two moving walls of foam and spindrift shut out the horizon.

Carlo dashed after a rabbit, and Mirabel laughed.

"He tries so hard, poor fellow, but never catches one," she said. "If I want to change the menu and dish up stewed bunny, I have to shoot one, and I hate doing it; *enfin, je me passe de lapin en fricassée.*"

Her French accent was perfect, and David staged another piece on that mental chessboard of his. But he only said:

"I'm a bit of a German myself in my dislike of rabbits—cooked, that is. They offer good sport with a couple of ferrets——"

"Oh, ferrets are horrid!" she cried. "Donald brought some of the creatures here one day, and got a boatload of rabbits, but I forbade him ever again to desecrate our island sanctuary in that way. Now, up the brae! You must see our prize cave."

A little beyond the opposite crest they came to the lip of a curious depression, which looked as though some giant had used a scoop in that place. On the west and southwest it fell in a jagged wall, but, throughout two-thirds of its area, it shelved downward in easy grade. The face of the rock was pierced by a natural tunnel; near its mouth lay the skeleton of the too enterprising bullock, from whose remains a number of cormorants and other

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birds rose in a flurry when the two figures showed above the skyline. At first it seemed that the excavation was choked with boulders, but David's trained eye soon discovered that every niche and crevice held some rare plant, while so many varieties of lichen covered the rocks that a botanical specialist would need to exercise his brains to catalogue them.

"This is my father's hobby!" cried the girl, bringing her mouth close to Lindsay's ear, for the combined tumult of wind and sea was deafening. "Over two hundred different sorts of ferns and mosses are growing there. In fine weather you can walk through the cave to a strip of sand—a lovely bathing-place—and the sun is always glaring in at one end or the other—when he is visible at all. We sit here for hours in the shade, and I read aloud while my father smokes and expounds. I've read the whole of Virgil many times just in there."

She was interested solely in pointing out the exact scene of her labors, and David repressed a gasp of amazement unnoticed.

"Do you read Greek, too?" he asked.

"Pretty well—do you?"

"I resemble Shakespeare in one important particular. I have little Latin and less Greek, a shameless confession for an Oxford man. But, if it wasn't for this tempest, I would bellow an excuse."

"Come away; I don't like the look of that skeleton," she said, and raced back into the Dorlin, while

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David wondered how a man who was not "really quite blind" could exist on Lunga for many days without experiencing the fate of the unfortunate bullock.

"Now, what is your excuse?" she demanded, so seriously that Lindsay was amused.

"I have never graduated. I had been up only one year when family affairs took me to South Africa."

"But you must have been taught badly," she said. "When I was quite small I knew the names of most things in Latin, Greek, French, and German, and I have enough Italian to sing intelligibly. It is entirely a matter of system. Dad says that whole years are frittered away in schools."

"So I perceive," said David grimly.

"But, for all that, I am an ignoramus. There are other things than the mere gabbling of languages. I can't talk about theaters, because I have never been in one, though I have read a great many plays. I have never heard an opera, though I can sing most of them. I know Ealing from A to Z, but have never visited Regent-street, Oxford-street, or the Strand, except in a closed carriage. I could walk blindfold about Lunga, the upper valley of the Paillon, or the village of Faïdo in the Canton Ticino, but I have never visited the National Gallery, the British Museum, or the Louvre. Although we lived many winters within six miles of Monte Carlo, I never saw the Casino. We had plenty of books, but

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never a magazine or periodical. So you will observe that there are wide gaps in my education. Now are you satisfied? Haven't I told you quite a lot about myself?"

"I am aching to hear more."

She glanced right and left at the white walls bounding the seaward view.

"We shall have plenty of time for gossip," she said, with a happy little laugh that was divinest music in David's ears, for it surely meant that she was glad of his company. Moreover, she had not been parading her accomplishments. Her father, recluse and misanthrope though he might be, had at least taught her to be natural and outspoken.

They passed the house, picking up the jackdaw at the corner of the garden. He greeted them cheerily.

"Fine day!" he said, preening his one wing and a stump.

"One of the best, old chap," answered David.

"Mr. Hawley," said the bird, pronouncing the name with remarkable distinctness and giving it a curiously clear note of disdain.

"No," said David, "make it Lindsay, and you'll be a prodigy."

"Mr. Haw——" began the bird, but Mirabel's stick tapped the rock near his claws so vehemently that he skipped out of range with a croak of alarm. David felt rather than saw that the blood had ebbed away from the girl's face, and as he had reached

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that well-marked period in every young man's life when it is not to be endured that a young woman shall suffer a moment's embarrassment—one young woman in particular, be it noted—he promptly discussed the evil tricks of jackdaws.

“Those birds are worse than parrots, I believe,” said he. “They look as if they really meant to be impertinent.”

“Jack picks up names easily,” she said, with a precise utterance that was eloquent of effort. “A man, a Mr. Hawley, came here in August. I—I disliked him intensely, and Jack heard me speak of him, just like that. I wish he would forget it.”

“I hope he will never learn to say ‘David Lindsay’ in the same freezing tone,” laughed David light-heartedly. Whosoever “Mr. Hawley” might be, he was evidently a negligible quantity.

After that, Mirabel was silent, until they reached the rounded shoulder of Cruachan, from which the mighty rock, Dun Cruit, had apparently been sheared off by one of Jove's thunderbolts. Lindsay remembered the names, because they were marked on the chart, so he startled his companion out of a gray reverie by mentioning them. Incidentally, he garnered one of those shy, inquisitive glances which thrilled his heart with a species of rapture; but Mirabel was aware of the chart's revelations, so she merely observed that Donald had failed to translate Dun Cruit into adequate Anglo-Saxon, so she had christened it the “Harp Rock,”

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because Dun meant Fort and Cruit might have been intended for Harp.

"It isn't much like a harp," criticised David.

"Nor is the vox humana stop on an organ much like a tenor singer. Wait till you hear my harp's music. To-day's din is too Wagnerian, but, when the tide rushes through the cleft in calm weather, the solemnest and saddest notes come pealing up from the depths."

"May I indulge in a closer look?"

"Why not? We can cross to the rock if you wish."

"What! By means of the plank?"

"Certainly."

"I don't think so," said David emphatically.

"Surely you are not afraid?"

"Oh, yes, I am!"

"But it is only twelve feet from ledge to ledge."

"It sounds little enough for one who can jump eighteen. Still, I'll take your word for the beauties of the Harp Rock, and remain on Lunga."

"And you a soldier, too!"

"A soldier isn't necessarily a chamois, Miss Mirabel. My blood ran cold while I watched you yesterday. If I were a brother or a cousin of yours, I would forbid you ever again to risk your life in that fashion. Mountaineering or rock-climbing, when you are properly roped, is quite a different matter. Why in the world did you take refuge

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there? You might have hidden in a hundred other places."

Mirabel did not choose to answer. They were standing now at the apex of the obtuse angle formed by the narrow chasm. It was fully a hundred feet deep, with walls that were either sheer or overhanging. The sea was churned into a mass of white froth as it raged through the passage far beneath, and the wind boomed in the cleft with a tremendous rumbling note which David remembered as the dominant chord of the witches' chorus which accompanied the burying of Farrow and the salving of the cutter. And to think that this slender girl by his side should have crossed that devil's cauldron twice on a single plank, in a gale, while her arms were hampered by carrying a dog and a gun! The memory angered him!

"Come away!" he said, almost roughly, for he was quivering with the instinct of the man to chide the woman he loves when she willfully exposes herself to some peril from which he fain would protect her.

The magic of feminine intuition revealed his mood to a girl whose experience of men was obviously confined to the crochets and humors of a bookworm—in all likelihood a soured and crippled scholar who might well have adopted the "solitary" device of the Elzevirs, with its significant motto, "Non solus."

She laughed gayly and caught his arm, little

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guessing how the hot blood raced in his veins under the touch of her fingers.

“Shall I steady you?” she asked. “Have you what Donald calls a ‘gey bad heid’ for dizzy heights?”

“If your friend Donald has induced you to practice such tight-rope exercises, I shall begin to suspect him of possessing a ‘gey saft heid’ himself,” said David.

“You don’t know him, or you would not say that!” she cried, relinquishing her friendly grip and springing onto a boulder to spy out the whereabouts of the errant Carlo.

Lindsay, with an effort, shook off the nightmare terrors of the Harp Rock precipice. He was strung to a tense pitch wholly inexplicable at that moment in one of his steady nerve: but the time was near at hand when its malignant influence would be accounted for to some extent. They regained the faintly-marked track leading to the beach, and, once they had sighted the *Fire-fly*, the big bulk of Cruachan shielded them a little from the wind, which had veered more to the south. Here, then, it was possible to walk abreast and talk without shouting.

“I have no desire to shake your confidence in your pet Isleman——” began David, feeling that his gruffness demanded an apology.

“Oh, you couldn’t! He taught me the Gaelic.”

It was a delightful *non sequitur*, but David tried the soft answer which chaseth away a woman’s frown.

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"Of course, such a bond ranks with the thirty-third degree in Freemasonry," he said.

She tossed her head proudly, and this, too, was becoming one of David's pet gestures.

"At any rate, it is a bond whose strength no mere Southerner can ever hope to appreciate!" she cried.

"But I, even I, am a Celt. Will you please take me as a pupil?"

"Say 'loch,'" she said quickly, and David groaned inwardly at his own clumsiness, for he was no carpet knight and knew not how to breathe soft sentiment into a lady's ear.

"Loch," said he.

"Pretty fair; but I suppose you have heard that word often. Do you see that reef out there—that on which the sea is breaking so furiously—straight to the east from here."

He followed the line indicated by the alpenstock, and nodded.

"I recognize it quite well: I have observed it from a different point of view—pray introduce me," he said.

"Well, its Gaelic name is Sgeir Fhiachlach, which means 'Toothed Rock.' Say Sgeir Fhiachlach!"

"Come to some cavern where the wind howls loudest, and I'll try."

"You dwell beyond the Highland line," she said, affecting a fine scorn. "But I shall take pity on you, because the Gaelic is so expressive, a language

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contrived and kept alive by generations of bards. Listen to some of its music. That outlying square reef away there to the north is Tigh-oa, the Mermaid's House; the island in front of us—our Siamese twin, dad calls it—is Sgeir a' Chaistell, or the Castle Rock, and that little dot up near Fladda is Sgeir-na-h-Iolaire, or the Eagle's Rock. Even in English the names are beautiful. In the Gaelic they seem to caress, to lull one into dreams of the old days, when a free race lived on these islands, and there were real castles and monasteries perched on these heights."

David halted suddenly and produced a notebook.

"I begin the study of Gaelic on the spot," he vowed. "Now, Sgeir, I suppose, means 'rock'?"

He threw such honest enthusiasm into voice and expression that she was gratified; happily, neither was aware that David's too precipitate zeal brought him to the borderland of burlesque.

"Curb your ardor till we are under cover," she laughed. "Just one word more and we hasten to the yacht. Those two little hummocks between us and Fladda are the Cow and Calf—my name for them—properly they are Sgeir an Fhèidir, which means the Grass-covered Rocks. Between them and the nearer reef is the sea pool we call the Lagoon. You can hardly imagine, to look at it now, what a wonderful place it is on a sunlit day when the sea is smooth. The water is not blue, but turquoise green—that uncommon tint sometimes present in

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the Afghan stones. You find it, my father tells me, in the Seychelles, or on any coral reef. The water is so clear here in the North that in some lights you can see the crabs and lobsters sidling about among the rocks and note the very shadows cast by darting fishes. It is so interesting to watch the crabs. I know where one very fine *Eupagurus bernhardus* lives. He carries about a huge shell of a gasteropod mollusk, which is his house, or tent, and he can fight anything on the reef. He is a soldier-crab, you know."

She paused, because her sharp ears had caught a queer little click in David's throat.

"What is the matter?" she inquired.

"I could taste that crab," he said hastily.

"Oh, you couldn't eat *him!* The crab *we* eat is *Cancer pagurus*, and the Americans eat *Callinectes sapidus*."

"Do they eat many of them?" asked David.

"I really cannot tell you. I suppose so."

"That accounts for the national disease of dyspepsia," he said firmly, and the crisis passed.

The strangest element in this strange conversation was Mirabel's complete unconsciousness of having uttered a word out of the common run of young ladies' speech. David determined, some day, to get her discoursing on the basalt of Lunga. But not now. They were nearing the shore.

"This is the Corran," she said, pointing to the shelving beach where the *Fire-fly* lay high and dry.

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"You cannot imagine how alarmed I was when I came to the well yesterday morning and saw the yacht. I stole a little nearer, and Carlo ran on ahead and barked, but I dared not call him. When you rose up from behind a rock I ran like a deer to the ruined huts and hid there until——"

She turned to him, and her eyes were sympathetic.

"How trying it must have been for you to bury that poor fellow! Please don't think me too unkind. I was afraid, dreadfully afraid. I thought—well, I had better say it, and clear myself a wee bit—I thought you had come to take me off the island, and, terrible as it sounds now, I was glad you were wrecked."

"So am I, now—if only poor Farrow had not been killed."

"What made you think of digging a grave in the shingle?"

"I tried elsewhere——"

"Yes, I saw you, but not many men would have thought of selecting a place below high-water mark. It is best as it is, perhaps, but, if I had not been so scared, I could have shown you our island cemetery."

"Is there one?"

The words leaped out with a certain sharp note of interrogation, for this blue-eyed sylph's Gaelic lore and knowledge of the genus Crustacea were far less disconcerting than her casual reference to the local graveyard.

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"Yes, in a sense," she said. "A poor ship was driven ashore many years ago on the southwest rocks and all of her crew were drowned. The crofters buried them, not far from the cave I showed you, and such a gale raged for weeks afterwards that the people abandoned the island. We Highlanders are very superstitious, and our Lunga folk regarded the wreck as a warning—at least, that is what Donald says; but my father has never allowed me to fear death, which, after all, is only transition. The lovely basaltic columns on which we stand were once glowing lava, yet surely they are not dead in their present solid beauty. To-day they are wrapped in their gray cloak, but you shall see them in other raiment when the sun shines, and you will say that you have never before seen such glorious colors."

So David had not to wait long for his lecture on geology, but the marvel in his soul grew to a fierce pain and wrath of non-comprehension as he tortured himself with useless speculation anent the reasons which led this truly remarkable girl to make Lunga her convent, the burial-place of her ardent youth and rare intelligence.

What did it all mean? What mystery lay behind it? She roamed this rugged island with the fearless steps of Diana. She was wiser than any pagan goddess, yet simple as a child. She loved her student father, who must certainly be alive, or she would not quote his teaching and opinions in the present tense, yet she was separated from him, and

THE GIFT OF TONGUES

dreaded an enforced return to the mainland with such depth of loathing and rebellion that she did not hesitate to hide on that fearsome rock, or carry a gun for protection, if need be, from the looked-for captors.

Well, let the Philistines arrive while this David was at hand! Pray Heaven that Mirabel's hated Goliath might be among them! Did not Israel say: "Have ye seen this man that is come up? . . . and it shall be that the man who killeth him the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter. . . ."

They were scrambling down the path, and Lindsay must have been looking very stark and stern, for Mirabel thought fit to rally him gently.

"What is troubling you?" she said. "No one can possibly have touched the yacht. If the whole British navy lay round Lunga in a ring, they could not land a boat here until the gale dies down, and not for several days afterwards without incurring the worst kind of risk. The Atlantic swell is just as dangerous as the storm itself."

"Thank God!" muttered David under his breath; but aloud he prevaricated.

"I was just thinking," he said, "that, with a bit of luck and a good deal of hard work, I might patch up the cutter sufficiently to sail her to Oban for repairs."

"She doesn't seem to be greatly damaged," said the girl; but the vivacity had gone from her voice,

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and David could have bitten his tongue viciously because of the stupid words he had just uttered. Could he have supplied no other explanation of his scowling visage than a downright avowal of anxiety to be off?

He was so annoyed at his folly that he rather forgot the repressive code he had imposed on himself. Putting a hand on Mirabel's shoulder with a big-brotherly air, or the best imitation of it he could muster, he said:

"Don't misunderstand me, little girl. When I leave Lunga, you go with me."

"I am not a little girl, and I shall do nothing of the sort. How dare you come here and tell me what I shall do and what I shall not do?"

Her blue eyes gazed angrily into his brown ones, and they stood facing each other in silence for a moment. Then David smiled, and there were women in many parts of the world who had said in their hearts, "I wish that that young man's smile was meant for me."

At any rate, Mirabel laughed outright.

"Don't be absurd," she said, coloring somewhat. "You may be tired of my company long before you can sail to Oban or any other port. Now, let me rummage your stores. Have you any jam? I adore jam, and I haven't a spoonful in the house."

CHAPTER VI

CONFIDENCES

ONCE aboard the lugger, and the girl became a very womanly Mirabel turned loose in a shop. Sailors are notably fond of sweets, so David knew exactly where to put his hand on several tins of jam and two boxes of mixed biscuits, but Mirabel brought to light a stock of pickles and spices, the presence of which he did not suspect, for Tresidder, the missing man, was a first-rate cook and supplies were never stinted.

Fortunately, the *Fire-fly* was victualed for a long cruise. Although, at the time of the accident, she was only bound for Islay, where David meant to pick up a Highland laird and two other men for a week's shooting, the need of supplementing local provender had been enjoined on him, so the lockers were crammed to repletion.

There were fresh eggs, tinned delicacies of various sorts; tea, coffee, and cocoa; two hams, a case of small bottles of champagne, some claret, four dozens of beer, a bottle of liqueur brandy, and a large quantity of potted meat and ship's biscuits, which latter items were always carried in full bulk.

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Mirabel's eyes opened wide when she saw the wine and beer.

"You meant to live well on Islay," she said, when David told her the objective of the voyage which had ended so surprisingly. He smiled.

"My usual beverage is water," he explained. "Of course, if anybody wanted a glass of wine. . . . I can recommend that claret," he added, showing her the label of a famous chateau. She nodded, with the knowing air of a headwaiter.

"My father's favorite vintage! It took us quite a time to become used to the English way of classing such wines as claret. The term is seldom used in France, where *clairret* refers to the light-yellow or light-red vintages, to distinguish them from the *vins rouges ou blancs*."

"John Bull says that all red Bordeaux wine is claret, and claret it has to be, no matter what the Frenchman may think."

"Please may I take the jam and some of the condiments? Have you any oil—paraffin, for choice?"

"Surely you will let me tranship the whole of these stores to the house? If I am not trespassing, I hope I may take my meals with you."

"Of course. But why trouble to carry away things we may not need? I shall enjoy coming here to rummage. By the way, have you a sleeping-suit?—and you will want some linen. You will be given a decent bed to-night. I only put you in the sitting-

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room last night because I thought you ought to have a fire, and there are no grates upstairs."

Mirabel invariably said the unexpected thing, and David was thankful that his head was bent over a locker. He certainly reddened a little, but, being a gallant and true-hearted gentleman, he did not hesitate a second in replying:

"I feel I am causing you no end of trouble, and I meant to sleep here to-night, but—if you prefer that I should stay at the house——"

"What nonsense! Sleep here, indeed, in a high springtide, when there are three vacant rooms at your disposal!"

"Your will is law, my lady," said David.

He had foreseen that this question would arise, and his decision was precisely what any man of good breeding would have arrived at in his stead. The tenets of convention had been outraged long since. These two were absolutely alone on the island, and, if ever their plight became public property, the leering eye of slander would not discern any difference between his occupancy of the yacht's cabin and a comfortable bedroom. If he refused point-blank to sleep in the house Mirabel would feel hurt, and already he knew enough of her candid and truth-seeking nature to anticipate the indignant questions she would shower on him. He could picture the cold scorn of her glance when once she had fathomed the real reason of his nice distinction. How he would wilt under those deep-seeing eyes, so wise in their

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innocence, so unconscious of evil in their calm outlook on a world whose greatness and glory she understood in a way vouchsafed to but few women. Assuredly, that half-blind philologist and scientific thinker, her father, had reared in this lovely girl one who would be more completely out of place in a society drawing-room than moorland heather in a garden of exotics. It seemed to David that the self-contained hermit who had built a retreat on Lunga had planned the education and upbringing of his daughter on lines that would be better understood by an Athenian in the heyday of Greece than by a citizen of modern London. What a result he had achieved! What a well-stored brain he had cultivated in a perfect body! But why seclude such a girl from a social circle which would soon learn to prize her at her true worth? Again that ever-maddening question sprang at David with vicious insistence—why did she return alone to the island five days ago?

Blithely unaware of the problem that was distracting her companion, Mirabel wondered at his unusual lack of words. He pretended to be investigating a box of clothing and boots, but that was no reason why he should not talk.

“Have you mislaid something?” she inquired, sitting down on a locker and eying him intently.

“Yes,” and he dived anew into the jumble.

“What is it?”

“A pair of shooting-boots.”

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"Just like a man! You took them out five minutes since and put them on the top of the hatch. Confess, now—you were wool-gathering."

"Well—yes."

"Was I the cause?"

"Indirectly."

"Put the horse before the cart and recite."

"I was hoping we might have a starlit night; soon."

"I can promise you that before you step ashore on the mainland again. But where do I come in?"

"You have crushed me with your classics and your lore of sea and land, so I want to take you on at astronomy. I am a dab at constellations and can play marbles with planets."

"But you are a mighty poor fibber, Mr. David Lindsay."

"Really, Miss Mirabel——"

"Locksley. Now, will you be good? You squeeze each of my little secrets out of me by weight of polite inertia. I've told you where I live when I am not on Lunga; I've told you my father's name—or rather, I'll tell you now and have done with it, Arthur George Locksley—and I have told you that wild horses wouldn't drag me away from my island. Is there anything else you want to know?"

"Yes—something that you cannot answer."

"Let me judge."

In that tiny cabin David could not stand up and

MIRABEL'S ISLAND

look her square in the face, so he sat on the opposite locker.

“Suppose, for the sake of argument, I go away when the weather moderates, what will become of you?” he said. “I am not thinking now of the minor affairs of life. You have a house, food, and fire, and you are not only well fitted to look after yourself, but have acquired the habit. But you might meet with an accident. You did not read my thoughts quite accurately when you twitted me with being afraid to cross that ugly gash in the rock. It was on your account that I shuddered. Sure-footed and agile as you are,—you said you ran like a deer, and I can well believe it,—you must not hug the delusion that you can live on Lunga with the same easy confidence in mortality statistics you might display in the valley of the Paillon, for instance. You didn't like the look of that skeleton half an hour since. Nor did I, though I have trudged deserts where bones marked the caravan routes for hundreds of miles. But suppose you had slipped like that sturdy brute, and, even if you escaped death—probably *he* did not die at once—had to lie where you fell, with a broken leg or dislocated hip! Why, my blood curdles at the very notion! Leave you here alone? Not I. That team of wild horses you spoke of will have to tackle me first!”

Mirabel rose. She had met his impassioned gaze without flinching, and a delicious little smile curved

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her lips when he made an end. From under her bent head her eyes peered at him amusedly.

"As I am less liable to stumble than you, oh, doughty explorer, I'll carry the eggs 'and jam," she said. "Will you bring the other things, please? But, if you like, I'll wait till you change your boots, because those long-legged ones give you quite a piratical air."

Then David dropped heroics for many a day. He suggested meekly that a patent cooking-stove in the fore-cabin might be useful and labor-saving, but Mirabel vetoed it instantly.

"I have to economize in oil," she explained. "When dad is here he has a lamp every night in his study—the sitting-room, you know. He sits up late—a habit of his student days,—but I go to bed and rise with the sun—almost, not quite—or I would hardly sleep a wink in June. My luncheon and his breakfast coincide, so all is well, and the arrangement suits me, because—promise you will not breathe a word to anyone but Donald—I have a *boat* hidden in a cave at the very south of the island."

"Surely that is a natural thing to possess here—a boat?"

"Dad wouldn't permit it, if he knew. He likes to feel himself utterly cut off from the rest of Great Britain while we are on Lunga. Donald smuggled a fat little tub of a craft across from Mull one day, years ago; every morning, in fine weather, I dodge about among the other islands—Fladda and the two

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Carnburghs. Once I went to the Dutchman's Cap, but that is rather a long way in the open sea, if a squall blows in suddenly from the Atlantic. Anywhere around the reefs I am safe; some friendly lobster-men showed me all the practicable channels at different stages of the tide. I have a second hiding-place on the Castle Rock, but, when the ark is housed there, I have to consider the hour of high-water, because the causeway is impassable then."

It was delightful for David to realize that she was taking him into her confidence. He thought he might risk a simple query.

"Are there only the two of you here when Donald has gone?" he asked.

She laughed, and gathered up her packages.

"Do you think I do all the house-work, then? We bring Pierre and his wife, Célestine, of course. They would go cheerfully to Kamchatka, if dad took them. He says their names suit the island—Pierre for stone and Célestine for happiness. Have I told you the name of our house?"

"No."

"Argos."

Lindsay looked blank, and Mirabel's eyebrows went up.

"Does that leave you cold?" she cried.

"Say, rather, shivering with anticipation."

"I thought everybody who had been to school would know something about the Greeks, at least. Argos was a center of civilization in a rocky land,

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and it contained the Heræum, the most noted sanctuary for women in Greece. Its chief temple stood in a nook—just like our house.”

“The style of your modern Argos is more Scottish than Doric, and the building has no sign of an attic.”

“That’s the best thing you have said yet, though I have tried you on many topics. What do you talk about when you mix with clever people in London?”

“One discusses the weather, the probable winner of the next big race, and the latest *cause célèbre*. But you, even here on Lunga, must know far more than I about the news of Britain. Until January last I was swallowed up in Central Africa for two years, and during all that time I hardly saw half a dozen newspapers.”

Mirabel shook her head.

“I never see a newspaper at all,” she said. “My father is dogmatic on that point. He holds that people who read newspapers read nothing else. Neither newspaper nor magazine ever comes to Lunga, or enters our house at Ealing. Sometimes, in our chalet near Laghet, I have found a page of the *Matin* or *L’Eclairneur de Nice*, which had wrapped a parcel, but dad made me put it away, and now I have got into the habit of disregarding the news. The other day in the—in the train—I bought some papers, but they didn’t interest me. Everything was strange and bizarre to my eyes.

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There was a chapter of a story in one, and what do you think it dealt with? Love! Not the all-absorbing ideal love of a Helen or a Cleopatra, but some sentimental make-believe in which two people talked twaddle to each other. I am sure the woman's face was powdered, and that she wore false hair, while the man must have resembled a barber's doll. Can one imagine Helen talking twaddle to Hector?"

"No, indeed! She would talk the purest Greek."

"This woman talked nonsense and bad English. It surprised of itself, and made me laugh, though I was not in laughing mood at the moment. There! Carlo is coursing another rabbit. I must stop him, or he will gallop himself ill."

She was out and over the side in a jiffy. Despite the burden of eggs and jam, she ran up the awkward path with the sure-footedness of a goat, and David heard her musical voice calling: "Carlo! Carlo! Come in, good dog!" The gale brought faint sounds of Carlo's excited barking, and then only did Lindsay realize what giant strides he had taken in a few hours in knowledge of Mirabel and her upbringing. It seemed as if he had known her all his life. Like himself, she must have lost her mother at an early age; for the rest, no matter where the dwelling-place, her father had deliberately cut her off from the world, isolated her as in the calm of a convent garden, and taught her languages and sciences without effort and almost without stint.

When they were pressing against the wind on

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the homeward path David halted in the small ravine where he had found the footprint.

"That is what betrayed you," said he, pointing.

"Everything has a purpose—but I did not think that any strip of sand on Lunga would turn traitor," said she, and smoothed the soft surface with the sole of her boot. David nodded approvingly.

"Most women, and a good many men, would simply have scattered that sand," he said.

"But one ought to think. By throwing sand about in a spot where it would naturally remain undisturbed I give an infallible sign of some living agency. I committed two errors yesterday: firstly, in not watching my own trail; and, secondly, in letting you steal a march on me."

"Yet we were bound to meet, sooner or later—once I had been cast ashore, I mean."

"Oh, why spoil a poetic conceit?"

"Wait till you hear my views on the question of parting."

"Come on, do. You will turn me into an idler, and I have heaps of work to tackle."

"Of what sort?"

"Household affairs, of course."

David dumped his parcels on the rock.

"Then I strike," he vowed.

"Strike whom, or what?"

"Don't you know the full meaning of a 'strike'?" he cried.

MIRABEL'S ISLAND

"To fell is a corollary of to strike," she laughed.

"But have you never heard of an amalgamated engineer or a society bricklayer?"

"Now you are talking weird English, like that woman in the novel. You cannot amalgamate an engineer other than by braying him in a mortar."

"Ah! I must introduce you to the grandest discovery of the past century. I demand my rights. I claim the right to work. I refuse to establish on this island an effete and luxurious aristocracy of laziness. I stand, or sit, or loll here until you agree to give me a fair share of the sum-total of labor. In a word, I strike."

"I see now. You stand still and do nothing but spout platitudes. Please hurry. The fire will be out, and I hate wasting matches."

Once they were over the hump of Cruachan, it was noticeable that the violence of the storm had spent itself. As a sailor puts it, the wind had dropped from "bare poles" to "close-reefed topsails," and the theory that an equinoctial gale lasts three days was justifying itself. They both were aware of the change, but neither commented on it.

The jackdaw joined them when near the house, and hopped inside as soon as the doors were opened. He sprang to his favorite perch, the back of a high kitchen chair, cocked his head on one side inquiringly, and said to David:

"Mr. Hawley?"

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The wealth of contempt and loathing which the bird contrived to put in those three syllables was remarkable, but still more noteworthy was Mirabel's sudden anger. Depositing her precious stores on the table, she darted at the offender, caught him, and beat him soundly before dropping him on the hearthrug. Though he made more noise than when he was pursued by the eagle, his mistress did not check him. It was quite evident that the mere mention of "Mr. Hawley" distressed her greatly.

David was sure that the sooner "Mr. Hawley's" obnoxious identity was cleared up the more quickly would Mirabel cease to trouble about the man, so he tried to provoke an explanation.

"Love and hate are closer akin than you may believe," he said. "Even the jackdaw knows that in his heart."

"I feel like wringing his neck!" she cried, raking the embers of the fire vigorously.

"Attend one moment while I quote an admitted authority," he said. "Browning has this in 'Pippa Passes':

"And if I see cause to love more, or hate more
Than man ever loved, or hated, before—
And seek in the Valley of Love
The spot, or the Spot in Hate's Grove,
Where my soul may the surest reach
The essence, naught else, of each,
The Hate of all Hates, or the Love
Of all Loves, in its Valley or Grove—
I find them the very warders
Each of the other's borders."

MIRABEL'S ISLAND

And now for the moral. Jack insists on greeting me as 'Mr. Hawley.' His acute but limited brain perceives no difference in essentials; whereas you, wise as Minerva, find in Hawley a rascal; in me, a friend."

Mirabel did not turn her head, but she sat back on her heels in front of the fire and listened. For a little while there was silence, broken only by the jackdaw's uneasy murmurings, for his feelings were sorer than his mailed ribs. Then she held out a finger.

"Beg pardon," she said.

The bird leaped to the proffered perch.

"Ho, ho, Jim Crow!" he chortled.

Mirabel twisted her shoulders and looked at David, balancing herself in a singularly graceful attitude by leaning on the disengaged hand.

"I ought not to have lost my temper," she said, with a pathetic twitching of the corners of her lips that affected David like a draught of strong wine. "I should have remembered that

" ' a flower is just a flower:
Man, bird, beast are but beast, bird, man.' "

"I am delighted to find that you have read Browning," said Lindsay.

"It is refreshing to find that you have read anything," she retorted, and with this flash of returning gayety she put the jackdaw on the fender, threw



HE WAS EVER DISCOVERING SOME NEW CHARM IN HER. *Page 111.*

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some wood on the hearth, and began to blow the smoldering embers into a blaze with a bellows.

David drew up a chair, sat down, bent forward with clasped hands and arms resting on his knees, and scanned the girl's face in profile. He was ever discovering some new charm in her. Now, for the first time, he noticed the way in which her long eyelashes drooped and curved.

"Why are you spanking me?" he asked.

"Because I am vexed with myself. Isn't that a woman's way? I suppose we women are all alike, and I have observed that if Célestine scalds her fingers she berates Pierre."

"Wouldn't you feel better if you told me why you dislike this admitted scoundrel?—No, I won't name him—call him X."

"I'll tell you this much, if you promise never to mention the creature again. I dislike him because I fear him. I realize now that he has cast some spell on my father, hypnotized him into folly. Yes, and that is why I am here, and I have no more to say. You are a perfect note of interrogation. Have I asked you one solitary question about yourself, once you explained your presence?"

"I am a very ordinary sort of mortal. You, on the other hand, invite inquiry."

"But why? My twenty-two years have been peaceful and devoid of interest. You have been out in the wide world. Even your jungles held more of real life than my cities. I possess no girl friends,

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and I have hardly ever spoken to a man, except those whom I have mentioned. Why, then, do you regard me as something strange and flabbergasting?"

"If you seek a cause, look around," said David in Latin.

"You are adapting Wren's epitaph. You see, I know that, yet I have never entered St. Paul's. Oh, I must seem a weird person! Of course, little as I may be acquainted with your world, I understand that a Mirabel Crusoe is something new in fact, or in fiction, for that matter; so, as a last word, I shall say that I came here to end an intolerable situation; and, if I utter another last word on that point, I shall weep."

"Don't, or I shall weep, too. But I want to determine one difficulty, and I have done. From what you have very generously and candidly told me, I am sure that a search will be made on this island as soon as the weather permits. You think that yourself, or you would not have retreated to the Harp Rock yesterday. Now, when the searchers come, what am I to do, or say? Punch somebody's head, or lie speciously, or what?"

The girl turned and looked at him with inscrutable eyes.

"I do not know," she said slowly. "I have cried myself to sleep many nights with thinking, but—Heaven help me!—I have no plan, no method, no

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resource beyond the wish to fly to some deep burrow like those poor rabbits when Carlo chases them."

"Ah!" said David.

"Rather hopeless, isn't it?" she murmured, with the merest hint of a break in her voice.

"Not in the least. The discussion is closed."

"But you yourself said that—that someone would come here at the first possible moment."

"Exactly. The situation is up to me. . . . Sorry, I must be more intelligible. Don't you see, there are *two* of us now on Lunga. One is a girl, who really cannot be bothered by interfering people. The other is a man, a hulking fellow who just loves a first-rate row for its own sake. Leave it at that. May I copy your way of closing an argument and ask—Can you make an omelet? If not, let me be *chef*. One day, in Nairobi, I shot a lion which was about to dine off a Portuguese slave-trader. Out of gratitude, the wretch revealed an Olympian recipe. Have you a Spanish onion?"

He won a smile, and felt sufficiently rewarded, but Mirabel could not banish her woes so readily.

"If I might place the same faith in your other recipe, I should be the happiest girl in—in Great Britain," she said.

"Then be a very happy girl on Lunga," he said. "I shall not fail you. But remember this great principle—you cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs."

MIRABEL'S ISLAND

“And that means?”

“It means this—if anyone lands in this island with set intent to annoy or harass you, there will be trouble, horrible trouble—for the intruder.”

“I care for no one, so long as my father does not lend his support to my persecutor.”

“It is a hard thing to say—but has your father treated you rightly in this matter?”

“In what matter?”

“It seems to me that the position is clear. A man, a person of some attainments and undoubted intelligence, wins his way into Mr. Locksley's good opinion. He makes himself so useful, or establishes such a claim, that he is invited to visit your island Paradise. He creeps, and intrudes, and climbs into the fold, and there he espies the shepherd's one ewe-lamb. ‘Ha!’ says he, ‘here is the girl I mean to marry.’ Mind you, I am not blaming him for that. Thus far, his purpose might be transparently honest. At any rate, I find it well within the bounds of a man's ambition. But how does he set about attaining his wish? Most probably, being your very antithesis, he affects a swaggering air, says, in effect, ‘Women find me irresistible; you, Miss Mirabel Locksley, can prove no exception to the rule,’ and, as a logical result—a result which some shallow natures can never foresee—you cordially detest him. Does he, like an honest fellow, vow that he will never

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love another, and hie himself off to Australia or the Far West? Not he. By fair means or foul, he means to win his way, so he persuades the girl's father that it is essential to his daughter's happiness that she should be forced to wed where she refuses to give her heart. The daughter, if she is the girl I have in mind, is tortured between affection and respect for her father and the liveliest hatred for the prospective bridegroom——”

“Mr. Hawley,” croaked the jackdaw sleepily, from inside the fender.

“Well, let it go at that, Diogenes,” said David.

Mirabel lifted her eyes for an instant; they were suspiciously bright.

“You have learnt a great deal about me in a little time,” she said. “You can see deep and far. I have always felt that there were things one could not glean from books. Now I know that my guessing was right, for I think I have read more than you, but I fear I could not peer so keenly into so many pages of your history on the same scanty material that you possess of mine.”

“It is a gift,” said David, and he laughed with a content that was soothing in the girl's ears. “I didn't realize that I had it so well developed, but the air of Lunga is stimulating. Now, Mirabel—may I call you Mirabel? Miss Locksley sounds formal in front of a kitchen fire, doesn't it?”

“Yes, David,” she said.

MIRABEL'S ISLAND

His voice grew a trifle husky, but he kept on valiantly.

“ Well, Mirabel, let neither of us forget that God's in his heaven, and all is well with the world. . . . Now, as to that omelet, you take half a raw Spanish onion. . . .”



CHAPTER VII

WHEREIN THE CLOUDS BREAK

THAT night, after supper, Mirabel exchanged rôles with her guest, and became the inquisitor.

They had been too busy to talk during the afternoon. There were logs to chop, and goats to milk, and loaves to be baked; and David had to fetch a banjo from the cutter, because the girl heard him humming a chorus of some popular song, and skillful questioning brought forth the discovery that he could strum tunes, for the banjo is the king of music-makers in yachts and camps.

But, when the last meal of the day was eaten, and David had asked and obtained permission to smoke—he stuck to his pipe; for some occult reason he disliked the idea of smoking Locksley's cigars, and he thought Mirabel might be offended if he produced a supply from the *Fire-fly's* store—his hostess bade him discourse of his own career.

She was seated on the hearthrug, with her feet tucked under her skirt, and teasing the sleepy terrier, when she lifted her eyes in a quizzical underlook and said:

MIRABEL'S ISLAND

"Thus far, Mr. David Lindsay, I have taken you completely on trust. Now it is my turn. *You* have not run away from your people and sought refuge on a desert island. *You* were brought here by an unlucky storm——"

"No. Do not call it that," he broke in. "I feel somewhat in the mind of William Pitt's sailor as to mere landlubbers. Do you know the lines?—

"'Poor creatures! How they envies us!
And wishes, I've a notion,
For our good luck, in such a storm
To be upon the ocean!'"

"Oh, hush!" she said, with a sweet solemnity. "If you had seen yourself as I saw you, rising, as it were, from death to life. I shall never forgive myself, never."

"Please don't be discursive. And why break our bargain?"

"What bargain?"

"Mirabel!"

"Well, David, then, though I shall feel dreadfully lonely without Mr. Lindsay."

"What dire prophecy are you uttering now?"

"The glass is still rising. Do you hear that soft note in the wind? If it veers to the southeast, I shall be almost looking for Donald this day week."

"And to-day is?"

"Thursday—have you forgotten?"

"No,—that is, not exactly,—but I had a mo-

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ment's terror lest it might be Friday. In any case, Donald's comings and goings will have no marked effect on me."

"What does it matter what day of the week it is? You are slippery as an eel——"

"What sort of eel?"

"But, wriggle as you may, you cannot escape me now——"

"Was ever eel more content with capture?"

"—So, begin at the beginning, and tell me all about yourself."

David hemmed loudly, whereupon the jackdaw coughed.

"I am the only son of comparatively wealthy but honest parents," he said. "I was born twenty-six years ago in the city of Calcutta——"

"I knew you were no true Scot!" cried Mirabel.

"Fair maid, I would have thee realize that the *perfervidum ingenium Scotorum* makes light of such hindrances as time and place. Scottish birth is a privilege bounded by no borders. Why, once in Durban, when a half-caste named MacWatt married a dark lady named Graham, I noticed that the announcement of their wedding bore the legend, 'Glasgow papers please copy.' I triumph over lesser difficulties, for my father and mother were born in Argyllshire."

"Where?"

"Near Oban."

Luckily, his questioner let the statement pass, for

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David did not wish her to know as yet that he was the eleventh baronet of a family with extensive estates in Scotland and England. For one breathless second disclosure hung in the balance; but Mirabel's brows were knitted in firm resolve; she treated Argyllshire as an irrelevancy.

"Go on," she said. "You were born in Calcutta. That, at any rate, is a start. Were your people in the Army or the Civil Service?"

"The Army. I oscillated between a bungalow at Garden Reach and a hotel in Darjeeling until I was three years old; then I was joined by a sister——"

"Is she still living?"

"Yes."

"And your father?"

"No. Poor old chap, I lost him nearly seven years ago. That is why I left Oxford."

"But your sister will be wild with anxiety about you."

"Not yet. I have been weighing the pros and cons of it, and the present position should be that she will think I am on Islay, the fellows on Islay will think I am at Oban, while the gale renders communication impossible for the time. Moreover, my sister would not wear mourning for me until every other sane person had been convinced that I was dead a year and a day."

"That means you have had adventures. I fancy I should like your sister——"

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"Oh, you would, you will."

"You shall tell me to-morrow what she looks like, and where she lives, but to-night I insist on your story," said Mirabel severely.

Doubtless it interested her. David had seen a good deal during his wander years, and he had never before secured such an auditor. He told how his father had plunged into speculation during the South African boom, and had pledged the estates to the last penny when the crisis came. The Argyllshire property was let on a seven years' lease; the bigger house in Herefordshire found a yearly tenant, and the stout-hearted major-general had gone to Johannesburg, there to watch the development of the mines in which he had sunk his fortune, and hold his own, with scant knowledge but with Scottish tenacity of purpose, against the schemes and stratagems of Jewish financiers.

The struggle wore him out. David, summoned by cable, arrived in time to see his father die, and receive his final mandate: "Don't let go, Davie! They'll try and make you sell, but keep a tight grip!"

And the son had obeyed, even in the depths of calamity before the war. And then came the outbreak of hostilities, and the four years of a bitter struggle. At its close, David, now thoroughly at home on the veldt, gathered a small expedition at Salisbury, crossed the frontier of Rhodesia, and lost himself in Central Africa. In his own interests, it was the best possible thing he could have done. Even

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mining magnates must keep within the four walls of company law, and, throughout every twist and twirl of the consolidations and combines and reconstructions which marked the period of stagnation at the end of the war, his shares became even more valuable, until, when he reached England again, the solicitors who had watched over his affairs were able to tell him that he was a rich man, while his sister, now married to a naval officer, was well provided for.

David, in his recital, slurred over the financial details, which, he was glad to note, were less appreciated by his hearer than his stories of bivouac and campfire. Though he was beginning to grasp the quaint narrowness as well as the extraordinary range of her studies, he could not help being impressed by her complete ignorance of current events. She could describe the geography of Africa, together with its fauna and flora, with a closer precision than he, who had lived in the country and observed its teeming life and physical features for six long years. But, concerning those things of which the men and women of the day were speaking in marts and drawing-rooms, she knew nothing.

She seemed to become aware that night, for the first time, of the real nature of the limitations imposed by her father's monastic method of teaching.

They talked late, and, when she awoke with a start to perception of the hour, she contented herself with a somewhat sad little tribute to David's powers as a narrator.

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“You have unfolded a map of an unexplored world,” she said. “I have often wondered what Pope meant when he wrote:

“‘Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of mankind is man.’

I have tried to obey the first line, but the second was beyond my reach, put there purposely, I am forced to believe. Thank you, David. You have shown me fresh woods and pastures new. To-morrow, and other days, you must expound in detail. Thank you again, and good-night.”

He followed soon to the room she had allotted to his use, and he did not fail to picture Mirabel kneeling in prayer for light in the unknown domain opening at her feet. She realized, doubtless, that the old life on the island had gone forever, and in that silent hour the untrodden path would be vague and dim in her eyes; but she must have felt, too, that this man who had come into her life would help her loyally and guide aright her faltering footsteps. As for David, his heart sang to the stars, for he hoped to call Mirabel his wife ere many months were sped.

Though he had practically made her acquaintance that morning, if she were other than a soul of crystal, a mind of limpid purity, he might have been in her company for a year and yet have understood her less intimately. In very truth, she was an island

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nymph, a vestal dedicated to the high gods, and whatever of mystery, whatever of sordid intrigue, had brought about the amazing predicament in which her father's madness and the obsession of a spurned admirer had placed her, she, at least, was uncontaminated.

David, like many another young man of a liberal-minded age, was left unmoved by the forms and ceremonies of dogmatic belief. But he was deeply religious by nature, and his heart was now uplifted in thanksgiving for the manifest design that lay behind the seeming hazard of his coming to this remote island.

He was strong, too, and valiant in purpose, for he resolved that never a word of love should cross his lips till this sweet mate whom he had found in the wilds was either restored to her father's care or placed under the protection of some woman whom she could trust. He boggled, perhaps, at the notion of "care" as applied to a parent who had tried to force such a girl into a hateful marriage. But he was shrewd and level-headed, and it was his habit to hold judgment in suspense, believing, with Madame de Staël, that to know all is to forgive all. Mr. Locksley must be a man of no mean character to have brought Mirabel to her present perfection of mind and body. He was a crank, undoubtedly, but a crank with a well-stored brain and a clear sense of hygienic laws. Nor could his parental authority be gainsaid. His daughter was obviously devoted

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to him, so he ought to possess many admirable traits, and nothing less than intolerable pressure could have driven the two apart.

"I'll bring them together again," murmured wise David, composing himself for sleep. "And this time, oh, contriver of rare gems, you'll have a more reliable man at your elbow than Mr.—Mr.—"

And there was no jackdaw in the room to croak "Hawley," nor any Mentor to warn this latest Telemachus against the folly of scanning the future by the light of desire. For David Lindsay, in the ordinary affairs of life, must be expected to take a dispassionate view of any given set of conditions, but David Lindsay in love was like any other young man in love—he looked through love's spectacles, which make rosy a gray prospect and convert the sorriest scrub into a garden of the Hesperides.

Of course, long before the sun shone again, and that was on the following Sunday, these two young people had extracted from each other nearly every noteworthy fact and circumstance of their lives. They were constantly together during the waking hours of each day, and, with the sole exception of Mirabel's recent escapade,—which she ignored completely, and which David schooled himself not to mention even by inference,—they discussed the past freely.

The apparent absence of billing and cooing in their talk brought it to a level which, though never

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commonplace, was certainly unusual as between a man and a maid in these days. David often found it necessary to instruct Mirabel in the simplest annals of recent history, either social or political, while he never ceased to marvel at the range and accuracy of her scholarship in subjects for which universities endow chairs of research. She had a sense of the meanings of words which struck him as almost miraculous, until she explained it one day in the clear, sweet voice that was so incongruous with such a dry-as-dust subject.

They were standing on the east side of the island, looking towards Mull, when David pointed to a couple of black fangs jutting out of the sea to the north of the great reef, which he now recognized as the Toothed Rock.

“My latest voyage takes the shape of an ill-remembered dream in my mind now,” he said, “but I think I came rather close to those fellows before landing. Have you names for them?”

“Oh, yes. Every rock in the Treshnish Isles is named, and each reef as well. Naturally, the lobster-fishers know the floor of the sea as a farmer knows his fields. Those rocks are Sgeirean-na-Guisaich, or The Rocks of Tall Weeds, but some of the old fishermen call them Eaigalach, or the Evildoers. The most curiously named rock in this part is that one” —and Mirabel indicated a huge boulder close to the shore. “Its proud title is Clach-na-Stairaim, meaning The Storm of Storms, and in the Gaelic, by the

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way, you get one of the real root words of human speech."

David put a hand on her shoulder. It was the one small luxury of fondling which he permitted himself, so he indulged in it often.

"You rather scare me, Mirabel, when you rap out a bit of information like that," he said. "I don't think it's good for your voice to strain your vocal chords so cruelly."

"Is that why you have not sought further lessons in Gaelic?" she laughed.

"No. If I tried for a lifetime, I could never master those sounds. How did you manage it?"

"I experienced no difficulty. You see, my father, in teaching me languages, insisted that I should seize the sense of every sentence in the same way as a child does in its native tongue. If we were speaking Latin, for instance, I had to grasp the case and tense of words by their terminations; I understood the meaning in Latin, not in English, and by practising that trick in five languages it soon became easy to adapt it to a sixth or a seventh. Moreover, dad was always ready to give me the history of a word, a thing of utmost interest in itself, and quite as capable of being wrongly comprehended as the history of kings and queens. Teach me a few hundred words of any language and I will guess most of the remainder. So late as last July we tackled Chinese for amusement—only the ideographs, you

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know; spoken Chinese is impossible when you haven't a tame Chinaman on the premises."

"Evidently I arrived here in the nick of time to save you from a horrible fate," began David.

He stopped abruptly, and wanted to bite his tongue when he saw the dark shadow of memory flit across her eyes, for it was not he but another who had put an end to the peculiar form of amusement which appealed to the Locksley household.

"You told me you spoke the *taal* well enough to act as interpreter," she broke in, with a quick tact for which David was thankful. "Try me in that language. Say something slowly, and see if I cannot guess the meaning."

"You are the most beautiful girl I have ever seen in my life," said David, in the Low Dutch dialect of the Transvaal, never dreaming that she would understand.

She blushed a little, shook her shoulder free from his hand, and gave him one of those highly expressive and heart-searching glances which he was beginning to regard as his own exclusive privilege.

"I fear I cannot put that into idiomatic English," she said. "Shall we walk on? It is a rigid rule at Argos that we shall not loiter on this side of the island."

David glowed with sudden embarrassment, but he could neither explain nor amend this second blunder, so he inquired, chiefly for the sake of saying something:

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“Why not on this side, rather than the other?”

“Because the few vessels which pass up and down the coast make for Loch Tuadh, and the only people aware of our house are some local fishermen. But we must hurry, if we mean to visit the Castle Rock before the tide turns.”

“Don’t be vexed with me,” he said humbly. “I was an unbeliever, and have been duly punished. I said the first thing that came into my head.”

“Evidently the phrase was pat on your lips. Did you use it often to the Dutch ladies in South Africa?”

“Even in the *taal* one tries to tell the truth,” he said.

She laughed, but in the next instant set his pulses drumming again.

“What in the world have you been doing to the *Fire-fly*?” she demanded.

He had forgotten the half hour’s early morning task of the previous day. Going alone to the cutter for a tin of sardines, he had taken the opportunity to unship the stump of the mast and arrange a few heavy bowlders against the port side and on deck in such manner that anyone examining the island from the bridge of a passing steamer would mistake the hull of the little vessel for a long, low rock.

“Salvage is sometimes another name for sheer piracy,” he explained. “I did not want our storehouse to be plundered by some sharp-eyed skipper;

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moreover, if the yacht were found, a search would be made—and we don't want that, do we? ”

She nodded. They had mutually avoided any discussion as to developments when the weather improved; although there were no signs of the kites and bonfires David had spoken of in his note, Mirabel had not thought fit to comment on his inactivity; yet the wind had lulled itself to rest, and the heavy Atlantic swell was diminishing hourly.

A gleam of sunshine suddenly irradiated Lunga, which warmed and burgeoned into multi-colored life. David, for all his years spent abroad, was sufficient of a self-centered Scot to follow a trail with the nose of a beagle, and he would certainly have availed himself of the chance turn taken by their talk to set forth the project now fixed in his mind had not Mirabel cried excitedly:

“There! Now you see why the Norsemen called my island Lunga, the Green Isle. Isn't it glorious? And look at the sea! That deep, cold blue only comes after a storm. I love it, yet it brings my heart into my mouth. That poor ship I told you of, whose crew lie buried beyond the Dorlin, was laden with indigo, and the sea, so beautiful, so pitiless, never relents or forgets; so that wondrous tint is only the smile of an implacable force, brooding through the centuries. It always reminds me of those poor, dead sailors, crushed in the last embrace of the goddess whom they served, while she flaunts a mantle dyed with their vessel's heart's blood.”



SHE STOOD WITH ARMS OUTSTRETCHED, HER LIPS PARTED AND HER EYES SHINING.
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In some natures, the thought would be morbid, but Mirabel was not as others. She stood with arms outstretched, her lips parted, and eyes shining. True child of the sun and the wind, she seemed to hail the rainbow hues of sky and ocean as a blending of unutterable griefs and harmonies. Then a veil swept over the scene, and its vivid life died, and the awed David dared not speak, for tears bedewed the long lashes, and he felt that he was sharing the visions of a sylph.

Next moment she was smiling at him shamefacedly.

“Isn't it stupid to let one's emotions run away with one in that fashion?” she protested. “I vow I am light-headed to-day, but sometimes I feel like Benedick, who had a heart as sound as a bell, and his tongue was the clapper, and what his heart felt his tongue spoke.”

“Would that I, too, might emulate him!” murmured David, but the girl, coy as Beatrice, though blithely unaware of her coyness, ran on ahead.

“Here is a smooth bit!” she cried. “I'll race you to the beach!”

He caught her, after no mean effort, and held her for an instant panting in his arms. Then temptation gripped him, for her waist was soft and supple, than which, if women but knew, there is no deadlier lure for a man; he was sorely moved to kiss her then and there, and straightway cross the arid desert that ever shuts out the dumb lover from the

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land of his desire; but he forebore because he loved her, and again because he loved her, his breath labored heavily.

"You can run," said Mirabel coolly, "though I could have beaten you in a mile. You are out of form. Take what Donald calls 'a wee trot' every morning for a week, and we should be a fair match."

David sighed.

"I shall train at other odd hours as well," he said, and Mirabel seemed to find more in the words than showed on the surface, for a sudden constraint fell upon her, and they were halfway across the isthmus of the Castle Rock before she was chatting freely once more.

In the retrospect of later days David was tortured by the bitter-sweet knowledge that Mirabel's wood-nymph spirit had fluttered in half-conscious alarm during those few fleeting moments. But she placed the trust in him that pure women and children give fearlessly to untarnished men, and a second crisis passed that evening without the slightest whiff of suspicion blurring her happy mood.

It arose thus.

David was telling of a moonlit trek through a lion-infested belt near Uganda, when the girl rose from her favorite pitch on the hearthrug and peeped through the drawn blind.

"Stars!" she cried joyously. "Stars in myriads! Now, Galileo, give me a taste of thy true merit."

They went out, heralded by Carlo, whose

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hunter's soul rejoiced in comprehension of the ways of rabbits, whereupon he was sternly repressed, and put on a leash.

David began at once.

"There is Andromeda," he said, "and Perseus near her, of course, with Cassiopeia completing the triangle, and Pegasus soaring away to the west."

To one steeped in the classics the names needed no explanation, but Mirabel was pleased to be demurely admiring.

"Can you pick them out so readily?" she cooed. "I always fancied that in reading the sky one had to find the Great Bear first and then draw imaginary lines."

"Imaginary lines are hard to draw sometimes," said David.

"They are useful on small islands," she retorted, and David, though occupying dangerous ground, only changed front.

"We are favored to-night," he went on. "Mars and Jupiter are on the stage, doubtless discussing Venus, who will appear later. Ah! here is Ursa Major. You remember the legend?"

"Of Callisto? Poor thing—it was hard that she should be slain by her son after being changed into a bear. Diana might have been spotless, but she was cruel, although the moon, which bears her name, looks bland."

"And is spotted."

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"I am rather glad of it. I am sure there was gossip about her on Olympus. Where is Boötes?"

"There, containing Arcturus, one of the finest stars in the heavens."

They were high on the shoulder of Cruachan, and gazing to the northeast beyond the dark blur of Mull.

A hush had fallen on earth and sea. Breakers growled and tore each other among the reefs, but their sullen strife only accentuated the calm of the elements, and Mirabel's ready idealism caught nature's passing whim.

"Listen," she said softly. "You must have heard that noise in the jungle, when jackals snarled over the remnants of the quarry."

"So our storm is ended," said David.

"Astronomy, please. . . . My fault, perhaps, but you do spring quickly."

"Look at Mizar, the second star in the Bear's tail," he said. "I need hardly ask if you can discern another little star just above him?"

The opportunity served; he placed his left hand on Mirabel's left shoulder, and she was standing on his left side. The attitude has been found suitable by star-gazing young people of opposite sexes ever since young people began to gaze at the stars.

"Yes," she said, "what of it?"

"The Persians called it The Test."

"Test of what?"

"Of eyesight."

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“ But anyone with ordinary eyes could see that.”

She turned and looked at him inquiringly. She was holding the straining dog with both hands, and a frenzied effort on the part of Carlo, who heard rustlings in a grass-grown cleft, drew her a few inches nearer. There was no reason why David's arm should slip; indeed, it only clasped her more tightly.

“ I mentioned it because you have eyes out of the ordinary,” he said, and, if his voice was flippant, his heart hammered furiously.

Perhaps she felt it, but she gave no sign. Stooping rapidly, she picked up the terrier and pretended to beat him.

“ For goodness' sake, show him the Dog-Star,” she laughed. “ Then, perhaps, he will take his mind off rabbits for a time.”

“ I cannot,” said David sadly. “ Sirius rises and sets with the sun.”

“ Wise Sirius, and fine exemplar! Thanks for the lesson. Now, we must hurry home. It is late.”

With each tide the sea continued to fall, until, on the Tuesday of her prophecy, Mirabel spoke of getting the boat out of its shelter and taking her guest for a tour of the islands, if the next day maintained the improved conditions. David went to the well on the following morning soon after six o'clock. The sun was not yet visible, but a purple and amber light changed the sea into a plain of burnished opal,

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beyond which the hills of Argyll were ultramarine shadows.

He had filled his buckets, and was fixing them on the yoke he had fashioned out of stout plank, when his glance fell on a boat which had just swung into view in the channel between the Castle Rock and the Mermaid's House. It was a roomy craft, broad-beamed and heavy, but it swept along at a rare rate on the ebb tide, and its occupant, a man, was using a pair of oars rather to guide than to accelerate its progress.

By this time, owing to Mirabel's instruction and his own study of the chart, David was well posted in the main features of the Treshnish Isles, and knew that no one unfamiliar with the ground would dare thrust a boat into the tidal current now racing across the reef.

"Donald Macdonald, of Calgary—and after him the deluge!" said he, but whether he felt glad or sorry he could not tell—perhaps he was glad that the period of inaction had passed, but sorry that an idyl was broken.

His first impulse was to hurry back to Argos and summon Mirabel, and he yielded unwillingly to the certain fact that before he could reach the house the newcomer would be ashore. He decided to leave nothing to chance, for chance has not earned its reputation by following fixed laws, so, setting down pails and yoke by the side of the well, he walked rapidly towards the Corran.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BEARER OF THE FIERY CROSS

THE man in the boat kept glancing over his shoulder; David, watching him closely, knew exactly when he discovered the presence of the yacht, and when he was transfixed with surprise by seeing an unexpected figure hurrying down the northerly slope of Cruachan. David, it should be explained, had discarded his yachtsman's rig for a shooting-suit; a few months later, should the weather become cold and settled, his appearance on Lunga might be natural enough, the island being a favorite halting-place of wild-fowl; but the boatman gazed at him now as if he were a pixie, and swung the boat around on her keel to allow of a fixed and prolonged stare from under the canopy of his left hand.

His actions proved his identity—none other than the man who had promised to visit Lunga at the first possible moment could have been so puzzled when he found the island tenanted by a stranger. But he was cautious withal. When Lindsay ran down the rough path to the Corran, Macdonald, if it was he, restrained the boat from drifting ashore, and the aspect of his seamed and weather-worn face was grim and hostile.

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"Weel, Tonal', an' hoo's a' wì ye the day?"

Thus David, arrived at the water's edge, and discreetly amused by the newcomer's dour visage. There was no answer, but the boat drew nearer, and its occupant moistened his lips with his tongue.

"Ye'll be Tonal' Mactonal', I'm speirin'," went on David, thinking to chaff this solemn Scot into a better humor, for he well knew that his own speech lacked the true Doric flavor and would never deceive the Highland ear.

A vigorous thrust of the oars drove the boat's stern-post into the shingle, and the newcomer rose and lifted an anchor from the bows. Then he turned, looked from David to the *Fire-fly*, and back at David again.

"Whatt are ye daein' here, Sir David Lindsay, an' whaur's Miss Meerabel?" he asked, holding the anchor by its shank, and seemingly not disinclined to bury one of its flukes in David's skull.

No flicker of astonishment showed in Lindsay's eyes, though the other was watching him keenly.

"Miss Locksley is at the house," came the quiet answer. "As you failed to send a postcard announcing your visit, she does not expect you this morning. Had ye no a bawbee? Aiblins, ye canna write?"

"Ye can handle the *taal* better than braid Scots, Sir David," said the other, leaping ashore and pulling his craft higher up the beach.

And now, indeed, Lindsay was bewildered, though

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Macdonald's prompt recognition had left him cold.

"How do you know I speak Dutch?" he demanded.

"Because ye're the same man, a bit bigger, an' five year aulder, that I met last at Krugersdorp. Has Miss Meerabel no tellt ye I was in Lovat's Scouts?"

"No."

"She'll hae forgotten, I'm thinkin'. When did *that* happen?" and Macdonald jerked a thumb towards the disheveled *Fire-fly*.

"On the fifteenth. Has not the yacht been reported missing? Is not that the reason you came to know my name?"

"I say 'no' to baith questions, Sir David. The fifteenth, ye say? Ye'll hae been here a matter o' ten days?"

"Are you really serious when you tell me that no inquiry has been made for the cutter?"

Macdonald imbedded the anchor firmly in the shingle.

"I've said it," he growled.

"And that we met last at Krugersdorp? What troop were you in?"

"F."

The fisherman strolled back to the boat, placed on the shingle a couple of covered baskets, such as farmers' wives use in the North for the carriage of butter and eggs; uncoiled a rope, tied one end

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to the rudder-socket and the other to a heavy stone which formed part of the ballast, shoved the boat off, and threw the stone into deep water.

Then, without another spoken word, he picked up the baskets and strode away in the direction of the cliff. For some seconds, David was thoroughly non-plused and inclined to be angry. Then he decided, quite rightly, that his own clowning was largely responsible for Macdonald's gruffness. He soon overtook the taciturn one.

"Donald," he said, "Miss Locksley has said so many nice things about you that I felt I had known you for years. And so I have, it seems, though you remembered, and I did not. Now, man, get the hump off your back. I shouldn't have doubted your word, and I am sorry for it, but, instead of taking a rise out of you, I got a fall myself. Let me help you with one of these baskets, and come this way, because I was at the well when I saw you rounding the Sgeir na Chaistell; my pails are waiting there now, and the water is wanted for breakfast."

Macdonald stopped. His clear gray eyes twinkled at the Gaelic words, but his features did not relax.

"They baskets are easier to cairry in pairs, Sir David——" he began.

"Would you mind trying to forget my title? Miss Locksley knows me only as David Lindsay."

"And why shouldna Miss Meerabel ken ye hev a handle to yer name?"

"A very proper question, if it meant that I was

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suppressing the truth. But it does not. There is no great harm in not proclaiming one's rank, seeing that I mean, God willing, to ask the young lady herself to honor me by becoming my wife."

Down went the baskets, almost with a clatter.

"The deevil ye dae!" grunted Donald.

"Put it any way you like, that is my firm resolve."

"Gosh, man! You've no said a worrd tae Miss Meerabel?"

David had certainly turned the tables on his new acquaintance, but, in his eagerness, was blind to the significance of the man's excited manner.

"Of course not," he said. "I was thrown ashore here during that gale last week, and Heaven in its mercy decreed that I should find myself in the care of one of the dearest and sweetest girls that ever trod the earth. We have been alone on Lunga for ten days, living here together as brother and sister, and God forbid that I should try and win her love under such circumstances! All I want is a fair field and no favor, but the field is not fair when a man has an impressionable girl for his sole companion in a house on a sea-swept rock. Except yourself, there is no man breathing, or, perhaps only one other, to whom I would bare my secret soul in this fashion, but Mirabel thinks so highly of you, and has such trust in you, that I am glad to take you into my confidence, and that is why I ask you to share the small secret of my title, because I want to surprise her

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with it when, if ever, I am so fortunate as to make her Lady Lindsay."

The morning air was shrewd, and Donald Macdonald looked to be hard as nails in his six feet of stalwart thews and sinews, but he had broken out in a perspiration, which glistened on his forehead under the brim of a sou'wester. He mopped his face with a red handkerchief.

"Ane ither man?" he stammered brokenly.

"Yes, her father. Some fellow named Hawley—I suppose you have seen him—has been pestering her to marry him, but I fancy—at any rate, I hope—that when I meet Mr. Locksley I may persuade him to look elsewhere for a son-in-law. I gather, too, that our young lady has run away from her admirer, and it is obvious that, sooner or later, she will be compelled to return to her father, or that he will search for her here. Till one of those two things happen, I shall not lose sight of her. Now that you have turned up, the position becomes simple, easier to control, I mean, and that is why I am more than pleased to have had this opportunity of explaining matters before you encountered Miss Mirabel herself. Mind you, Donald, I reckon on your help in every way. We are brother Scots, and I swear to you, by the memory of my mother, that I have told you the truth, both as to the past ten days and my fixed intent. There's my hand on it!"

Macdonald took the proffered grip, but he was a very different man now from the surly Scot who had

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made off in dudgeon from the Corran. He was shaken and agitated, and could find no words to cover his confusion.

“Gosh!” he muttered again, a wandering glance taking the heavens and the earth to witness his perplexity.

David laughed, as a young man will when he sees a fair path leading to the bourne of his desire.

“You didn’t hear such evil of me at Krugersdorp that I should figure in your mind as a bad husband, Donald?” he cried.

The other grasped at the opening thus given, but he was staggered by some thought, and he spoke but lamely.

“I’m thinkin’, Sir David—Maister Lindsay, I should be sayin’—I’m thinkin’—Miss Meerabel nicht ha’ been the lucky young leddy the day. But, ye ken—Maister Lindsay—I’d like tae hev a worrd wi’ her ainsel’. I never thocht, when I put off frae Calgary this ebb—I never thocht I’d be seein’ you here. There’s ae thing I maun tell her——”

“Is Mr. Locksley in Mull already?” broke in David sharply.

“Deed, aye.”

“And this Hawley?”

“Gosh, aye.”

“Are they coming here?”

“By to-morrow’s mornin’ tide—nae suner—ma freens ’ll see tae that.”

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"Well, we have plenty of time to talk over matters, and plan, and contrive."

"Aye, we hae that. Gosh! Let's be leggin' it!"

"David! David!" came a clear voice from no great distance. "Why, that is Donald with you! . . . Oh, Donald, how glad I am to see you! . . . I thought that Mr. Lindsay, like Jack in the nursery rhyme, must have fallen with his pails of water, so Jill came tumbling after. Donald, what *have* you got in the baskets? Do say you are bringing some chickens and plenty of fresh butter. Mr. Lindsay has eaten me out of house and home, and I have emptied his yacht's larder."

Here was Mirabel herself wringing Donald's gnarled fist, and laughing delightedly at having stolen a march on the pair of them, though blushing a little at the Jack-and-Jill simile, for she had really wondered what had become of the watercarrier, and had run all the way to the well with its telltale buckets when she caught sight of the two men standing on the edge of the cliff.

In her glee and momentary confusion she hardly noticed that her henchman's welcoming smile was of a somewhat frosty character, despite the beads of moisture which again bedewed his face. Stooping over a basket, she raised its coverlet of brown Italian cloth.

"Eggs, three chickens, and three ducks! Oh, Donald, you're a treasure!" she cried.

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Macdonald glowered from one to the other with the furtive eyes of a man at his wits' end.

"They were ready yesterday, Miss Meerabel, or I wad no hae brocht——" He muttered something in Gaelic under his breath. "Whatt am I sayin', ava? It's fair daft I am. . . . Mebbe, Sir—mebbe, Maister Lindsay, ye'll be fetchin' the watter, whiles Miss Meerabel an' me gae roun' the west side."

"But why cannot we all go the same way?" cried Mirabel, glancing up from an interested scrutiny of the second basket.

"I think that Donald has something for your private ear," said David, "and I am sure he will be happier when the message, whatever it is, has reached you."

Mirabel sprang upright with the rapidity of a steel spring suddenly released. To his dismay, David saw once more in her face that haunted look which he prided himself on having banished so effectually.

"A message! Not from my father?"

Alas! that Donald's long-looked-for visit should bring such terror and anguish into her voice. Her frightened eyes sought confirmation of the dreaded tidings ere the unhappy fisherman could reply, which he was in no hurry to do; and David felt that his presence was irksome.

"Of course, she is worried," he thought. "It will save her some embarrassment if I am not within ear-shot when Macdonald blurts out his news."

But he laughed happily as he turned on his heel.

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"Gang yer ain' gait, Tonal'," he said, "an' I'll lay ye a whole saxpence tae a plug of tobacco I'm at Argos afore ye."

Off he sped, without awaiting an answer to his challenge, though neither of the others spoke. As he climbed the eastern shoulder of Cruachan, he should have seen them on the lower western path; they were not visible; he stole a look of sheer curiosity, and they were still standing where he had left them. Now, oddly enough, it was Macdonald who spoke, and Mirabel who listened, while her eyes were fixed on the hills of Mull, already brown and green in the slanting rays of the sun.

Yet was he blithe and free from care as ever.

"It's just like having a tooth drawn," he told himself. "One dreads the wrench, but happiness comes when the mischief is ended. Mirabel is now on the road to the dentist. She will be glad when she has met her trouble and conquered it."

He shouldered the yoke and hurried to the house. Carlo, nosing the ground in search of his lost mistress, greeted him loudly. The jackdaw, preening his feathers on top of the garden gate, peered at David with a peculiarly knowing eye.

"What's up?" he demanded.

"Ructions," said David.

"Ding-dong!" said the bird.

"You're a necromancer," said David.

"Ho, ho, off we go, Tom, Dick, Harry, and Joe," said the bird.

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David jerked a pail, and shot a few drops of water over the philosopher on the gate-post, a trick which annoyed the jackdaw exceedingly. He sprang out of range, and yelped so realistically that the terrier pricked his ears, growled, and bristled for combat. This success wiped out the stain of the earlier indignity. The bird hopped a little farther away, put his head on one side, and said "David," in a voice that would have brought a reply from Lindsay had he not known that Mirabel was beyond the ridge.

He laughed, and the jackdaw cackled loudly, understanding at once that a laugh meant forgiveness for past transgressions. But what his acute little brain could not know was the marked difference between his pronunciation of "David" and "Mr. Hawley," and the world of meaning which that difference conveyed to his hearer.

The three entered the house together, since bird and dog were fully alive to the fact that the arrival of the water proclaimed the nearness of breakfast, but ten minutes passed, and the kettle was hissing and the porridge spurting jets of steam like liquid lava, before Carlo's quick ears detected Macdonald's footsteps.

Lindsay, in high spirits, appeared to ignore Mirabel's entrance, and bustled about with exaggerated haste. He avoided any semblance of scrutinizing the girl's face for signs of the threatened storm, but he happened to kick the chair which provided the jack-

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daw with a perch, and the bird screamed at him, whereupon Mirabel laughed, so he thought he might look at her.

She was rather pale, but quite composed.

"Don't imagine that you are impressing Donald," she said. "He has just been telling me how you behaved at Krugersdorp."

David's mind traveled rapidly in retrospect over some years and several thousands of miles. He shook his head.

"I don't remember being specially wicked there," he said.

"What is the D. S. O.?" she asked.

He glanced wrathfully at the fisherman, who was unwrapping some dried haddocks, and had his back turned.

"Donald, I presume, has been talking Gaelic," he growled. "I tried him in English, but he was tongue-tied."

"I remember the letter F, Sir-r——" broke in Donald, and at any other time David would have grinned broadly at the terrific roll of the "r" which averted an imminent blunder.

"Is there an F in it, too?" inquired Mirabel innocently.

"These alphabetical distinctions are becoming personal," said David. "Shall I put the H, O into the T?"

Macdonald twisted his head at that, but Mirabel laughed again, and her air of unconcern perplexed

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both men, though for reasons wide apart as the poles.

"Not yet," she said. "To-day we feast. Give me a quarter of an hour and I shall treat you to a Loch Finnan haddock. Meanwhile, please go outside and get an appetite!"

"I caught a good one at the other end of the island, but I'll curb it on condition that Donald's South African reminiscences deal exclusively with the adventures of Lovat's Scouts."

"Have no fear. He will never forgive me for having forgotten that he was a warrior."

She added something in Gaelic, and her tutor gave her a look which reminded Lindsay of the affectionate glance of a faithful dog.

"I only said that I was a little girl when I came to Lunga; war meant nothing to me then," she explained. "Now I know that it is part of life, and few can be so fortunate as to escape its tribulations. Even we poor women have our battles."

"And conquests," said David, at the door.

"And surrenders," cooed Mirabel, quite cheerfully; yet David did not find the sky altogether so bright while he lounged to and fro in front of the house.

During the meal the shadow of impending events lay heavy on Donald. The others talked and joked in a language which was quite incomprehensible to the fisherman. That is to say, they spoke English, but his knowledge went no deeper, and it was quite

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evident to David that the man was somewhat scandalized by Mirabel's flippancy. He expected her to behave as if she were a prisoner on trial for some grave offense, whose cause had been tried, whose last plea had been put forward, and who now awaited the jury's verdict.

"Evidently," thought Lindsay, "the pursuing parent is a masterful person. I hope Hawley is a husky fellow and will give me a chance to smite him."

Then he smiled at the nonsense of the idea that Mirabel was a girl to be fought for, like some village maid who had roused the passions of a couple of navvies.

Mirabel saw the gleam of humor in his face; at any other time she would have demanded its instant and full explanation; now she passed it unheeded.

"As the sea is smooth to-day," she said, "and Donald's boat renders us independent of a capful of wind, I purpose taking you on a tour among the outer islands. We can row to the Carnburghs on the flood, and come back with the first of the ebb."

Now, this was the last thing David expected to hear from her lips—even Macdonald looked at her in a sort of scared way—but she continued gayly:

"My father will be here to-morrow, and I cannot tell what plans he may have made, so we must seize this good opportunity, David, of showing you the beauties of the Treshnish Isles."

He expressed his readiness to fall in with any

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project she might suggest, for he believed that Donald would be left on Lunga, but, when a luncheon-basket was being packed, he discovered that the three of them, together with the dog, would share in the picnic.

Then, for seven delightful hours, they explored the group of islands, landing on many, and passing through rock-guarded channels in which the boat would have been wrecked many times, even on such a calm day, were it not for skillful pilotage. For swift currents churned and squabbled on the reefs, with here and there a lance-like rock below the surface to be avoided by deft thrusts of a boathook and twist of oars, which Mirabel's slender hands manipulated untiringly, while Donald knelt in the bows and kept watch and ward against seen and unseen obstacles.

David, perforce, was a passenger until they reached the open water of the channel which cuts off the Carnburghs from the long, low island of Fladda. Every rock had its name and legend, each sheltered pool its forest and busy inhabitants, and David had never marveled more at the astounding extent and variety of Mirabel's erudition than when he heard her talking Gaelic with the fisherman, translating his stories and quaint lore of the sea, giving marine growths their correct scientific nomenclature, and describing the ways and peculiarities of every fish and lobster and crab sighted in the blue-green depths.

On the Carnburgh Islands, too, she had the history of the ruined castle and monastery at her fingers'

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ends, and got David mourning with her over the priceless manuscripts lost when the monks' retreat was raided by robber galleys in the bad old days.

It soon became evident that the one thing she had set her mind against was any private talk with David. Twice he tried to tempt her away from Macdonald, and the latter aided and abetted him openly; but Mirabel invariably avoided the lure, and, after a second failure, David frankly abandoned the effort, and entered into the spirit of an outing which he was sure had its genesis in a resolve to ignore the morrow.

Donald's settled gloom increased as the day wore. His simple, stolid nature was unable to cope with this game of cross-purposes, and every careless laugh that rippled from the girl's lips seemed to pierce him with arrows. David, who had learnt to jest when the next moment might be his last, nevertheless admitted himself beaten and bewildered by Mirabel's unaffected enjoyment of every sight and sound. The ever-changing hues of sea and sky, the brilliant tints of rocks and weeds, the patches of white sand and black shingle, the quick flight of some slender fish startled from undulating repose by the passing of the boat, the scurry of brown and yellow crawling monsters when boathook or oar jarred against a rock—each and all seemed to thrill her with a delight that bubbled forth in words.

But no man could guess what this island princess would say or do while in her present wayward mood,

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and both Lindsay and Macdonald were completely taken by surprise when the boat grounded again on the Corran about five o'clock, and Mirabel, after a steady look at a distant fishing-smack beating up into Loch Tuadh, announced her wishes.

"When you have made fast, Donald," she said, "I want you to carry the basket to the house. Kindly prepare some fish for frying, and peel some potatoes, sufficient for a stew. Mr. Lindsay and I will remain here a while. You have both been very good to me to-day. Now I wish to dispel the little web of pretense which has veiled us during one happy afternoon."

She smiled wistfully, and turned away before either of the men could answer this strange speech, in which the trivial things of the household mingled with outspoken reference to anticipated sorrow.

At the moment, David was lighting a pipe, and became so engrossed in the task that Mirabel had reached the yacht and was half sitting, half leaning against its side before he attempted to follow her.

Donald, stirred into a sudden activity, began to rig mooring tackle as before, but he glanced at Lindsay from under his shaggy eyebrows and said in a stage whisper:

"Dinna be hair-r-d on her, Sir David. I mind her a bit lassie, an' my heart is sair tae see her in this pickle."

"What pickle?" muttered David, between puffs.

"Man, isn't she gaein' tae tell ye? Hev' ye no

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ee for a woman's fancies? She's been fey a' the day."

"Fey! What are you saying? One is fey when one dreams of death."

David's tone was curt, but Macdonald was unmoved.

"I ken weel whatt it means," he said, and busied himself in that part of the boat farthest removed from the other.

Angered by the man's stupid phrase, yet startled in spite of the belief that Donald was chiefly concerned because Mirabel's father had charged him with some degree of responsibility for the girl's presence on the island, David strolled toward the cutter with the least preoccupied air he could assume.

"What was Donald saying to you?" came the utterly unexpected question.

"I think he believes this is the Sabbath and that we shouldn't laugh," he said.

"Perhaps he knows me so well that he suspects my laughter as a cloak for tears."

"I can picture no more charming place for a lady to indulge in what she calls 'a real good cry,' if so minded. Please count on my sympathy. Shall I hold your hand?"

She raised her eyes and looked wistfully at him.

"Donald put in a plea for mercy. You see, I understand his ways. He is a man cut out of rock, with the heart of a child."

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David was determined to deprive the promised "explanation" of its seriousness.

"He mentioned his heart," he said cheerfully. "In fact, he described it as *sair*, and asked me—*me*, mind you—not to be hair-r-d on you. Donald is evidently not a close observer of men, however keen may be his perception of the passing griefs of women."

By this time Donald was mounting the cliff with the sweeping stride of one who was as much at home on the moors as on the treacherous seas of the West Coast of Scotland. Once he looked back at them, and Mirabel waved a hand.

"Passing griefs!" she echoed pensively. "That may be true. I know so little of life that I cannot be sure. But I think you are mistaken, David. Some imp of intuition grips me by the throat, and compels the belief that men and women sometimes suffer sorrows that do not pass, until, perhaps, one is old and worn, and the only joy left is the promise of rest. Oh, David, don't be angry with me, nor ask me why I have said this thing or done that! In these few days I have come to look on you as a dear friend, and it is the privilege of friendship to pardon, to condone."

All at once she seemed to have become so woe-begone, so hopeless, that David was fired to adopt strong measures. He sat by her side, put an arm round her shoulders, and drew her close. She did

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not resist him. He felt her yielding, but so inertly that he was almost alarmed.

"Now, Mirabel dear," he said, "just listen to a bit of plain common sense. Your father will probably be here to-morrow——"

"You must listen to me first, David," she broke in; "and when you have heard you will be dumb. . . . I knew what you would say, but you may not say it. . . . Heaven help me! I am married. Three days before I returned to Lunga I married that man, Hawley. . . . Now, David, what can you say? . . . You may pity me, dear—is it wrong to call you dear? If it is, let the punishment be mine, but you are my dear. . . . Oh, God! it is hard that I may not be dear to you. But you must forget poor Mirabel and her island, or, if you cannot forget, remember only that she was a child when you met her, and that you left her a woman. Oh, David, I think my poor heart will break!"

She buried her face in her hands and her shoulders heaved in a tempest of sobs. David, who sat like one paralyzed, felt the lithe body quivering under his arm. He still held her, and his hand fondled her hair, her ears, the proud neck, now bent and humbled. But not a word could he utter had it meant life or death for both of them.

Married! Mirabel married! He set his teeth and glared into vacancy with eyes that were not good to look upon.

CHAPTER IX

SOME EMOTIONS, WITHOUT A MORAL

THE dog, having raced ahead of Macdonald up the cliff, now came scampering back. Evidently he had never before seen his mistress weeping, as he thrust his shaggy head into her lap and whined his sympathy. Mirabel straightened herself, and Lindsay's arm dropped from her shoulders with a listlessness that aroused the girl from a stupor of grief, for she turned her brimming eyes full upon him.

"David," she murmured, and there was a cadence in her voice that might well have stirred him to frenzy, "you do pity me, dear? Say you pity me!"

"May Heaven help and direct you!" he said, with a calmness that might have deceived other ears than Mirabel's. She put a hand on his arm, with the protective gesture of a woman who thinks only of the man she loves.

"No. I am the guilty one. We must pray that help and guidance may be given to you."

"What guidance do I need?" he muttered, almost roughly, for his despair was as the ice that oft coats a volcano. "I can go away and bury myself in my jungles. It is all I am fit for."

"David," she pleaded, nestling closer, "don't be

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hard and bitter, even to yourself. I little knew what love meant, till you came into my life, and, if I closed my soul's eyes and ears to its warnings, am I so greatly to be blamed? Oh, my own dear, we have been too happy on our island, but life itself always ends in a tragedy. I shall suffer more than you, so you will not grudge me my ten days of beatitude, though, if Fate were kind, they might have been fifty years."

Now, not one word of love had David breathed to this gracious woman who was thus unveiling the inmost shrine of her emotions. That, in itself, was a maddening reflection. He found himself harboring the ignoble wish that his wooing had been spared the canker of knowledge—that Mirabel had concealed, till concealment became no longer possible, the barrier which shut him out forever from his heart's desire. The shock of discovering this rent in his own moral fiber brought about a calmer mood. Again his arm clasped the girl's trembling body, and a wave of tenderness and longing softened his voice and banished the furies from his eyes. Moved by her sheer dejection, and resolutely crushing all thought of the pain which would gnaw his heart-strings for many a day, he said gently:

"Why didn't you tell me sooner, dear? We might have been spared some refinement of torture. It is true that I would have tried to wrest you from any man, yet, had I but known, I—I——"

"You would still have acted as a brave and loyal

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gentleman, David—just that, and no more. Can you reproach yourself for a syllable that you have uttered while our idyl lasted? No, my dear. That is the cruelty and terror of our plight. You, with your wisdom gleaned from the greater world of which I form no part, saw that I was a creature of the wild, free and untrammelled as any dryad that ever flitted through grove in Hellas. You guessed that I had escaped from some vile bondage, but still I was little else than a pretty, untamed birl, singing in new-found happiness, and you could never have imagined what manner of cage it was in which I was immured. Nor could I have warned you, David, in those early joyous hours, that I might never be your mate. Indeed, indeed, you must believe me. If I have eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge, it was you who spread the tempting feast. I fled from the thralldom called marriage as a child might fly from some cavern-ogre met in the twilight gloom of a forest; but I knew nothing of love till you taught me, my beloved, and surely you may not be reproached for revealing to me the hidden mysteries of my being. And what alchemy did you use other than the faith and honor and reverence that a knight of the order of chivalry might lay at the feet of his chosen lady? Don't you realize, David, that you have never even kissed me? Will not my heart ever sigh and pine because I know that you never will kiss me? . . . Oh, kind Providence, let me die here in the arms of the man I love, for I shall testify

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with my latest breath to his truth and constancy, and he will glory in the memory when I have gone from him forever. . . . David, I asked you to forget me. I take that back. You will not forget me, dear, will you? In the years to come you will think of me, not as I am now, tear-stained and stricken, but as the girl who came to you through the blackness and fury of the storm—a little timid, perhaps, a good deal ashamed of her tardy trust, but who came, nevertheless, and led you to her sanctuary, and was not afraid to display to your wondering eyes her small wares of good looks and accomplishments, for she preened her feathers before you, and made herself as the king's daughter, all beautiful, not in vanity or temptation, but yielding and expanding under the unconscious leaven of your love."

That which in another would be hysteria was in Mirabel the opening of the floodgates of her soul. She had found her lover, preordained through the ages, and she did not flinch from the avowal of her most sacred thoughts. They gushed forth like some virgin spring new risen from the prison of earth, and David felt a rapture of pain in listening to their plaint.

But he repelled the promptings of his own throbbing heart, which bade him strain her to his breast till reason fled and passion reigned supreme. If he were truly her knight, he must be strong as well as devout, farseeing and patient in speech and action,

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while every nerve was on the rack and his soul ached with longing.

So, when the tears came again, and she was shaken with the violence of her grief, he stroked her hair and petted her as if she were indeed the child she pictured herself as being before they met in the crash of the hurricane. When he spoke, it was not to wile her into a fresh outburst, but rather did he strive to lead her troubled brain into the orderly paths of quiet judgment and explanation.

"Mirabel, my dear," he said, "dry your eyes and look at me."

She obeyed with a pathetic submission that pierced him like a sword, but she only saw a sad smile in his eyes, and his voice was low and soothing.

"There is a fatalistic element in the relations between man and woman," he went on, not for an instant relaxing that comforting hug which he persuaded himself was permissible in the circumstances. "As between you and me, what is done cannot be undone. We love each other, and the fact would remain a fact were this tiny island of ours to be suddenly resolved into its elements by primordial heat. Nor is it wrong, merely because it has happened. Providence threw us together, and I really don't see what Providence expected from me, at any rate, although the Wisdom controlling things as they are does not seem at this moment to agree with the Wisdom that arranges things as they should be. Of

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course, there was no such Heaven-sent certainty that you would come to care for me——”

“Oh, David!” she murmured, and hid her face on his shoulder, while the perfume of her hair assailed his nostrils and nigh reached his brain. It was well then that she did not see the mingled fear and desire blazing in his eyes, for David was a virile man, and never was woman more desirable than Mirabel. His right arm still encircled her slender form, and his hand felt the firm flesh of her arm beneath her dress, but the fingers of his left hand clutched the brass siderail of the yacht that ran from opposite the combing of the hatch to the bows, and he remembered that fierce grip later when he found his nails stained with blood.

The tension passed, yet he remained silent. Mirabel raised her head, and gave him one of those shy, quick glances which had so often sent a riotous pulse leaping through his veins.

“You must not ask me to imagine something that would be quite impossible,” she said softly. “I feared you at first, David, because I fancied you might be an emissary of my father’s, or of the man whom I must learn to call my husband. At least, that is how I interpreted my fear. I know now that where love is, there fear abides, too, and fear is only subdued by love, but never quite annihilated. Is that right—or is it only a girl’s foolish conceit?”

David’s lips twisted in the mere physical effort to say something that would divert her mind from this

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sudden fit of introspection. He understood quite clearly and thoroughly how Mirabel's marvelous faculties were expanding each moment, how she was reaching forth to the new horizon, exploring untrodden territory, and analyzing painful emotions with fearless candor. If he did not check this critical mood, he dreaded the possible outcome, for she was not as other women, and she might test his fortitude beyond its powers of resistance by declaring, once and for all, that she would defy the law which had made her an unwilling wife. He had chosen the narrow path of honor, and meant to follow it, no matter where it led, so he brought her now from cloudland to earth by the simple question:

"Will you tell me, Mirabel, exactly why you came to Lunga four days before I was cast ashore here?"

Evidently, she was not expecting any such downright demand; nevertheless, with a forlorn humility which, did she but know, was more agonizing to David than her tears, she answered, in all innocence:

"Of course, I want to tell you everything. That is why I have kept you here, while poor, worried Donald is preparing supper. I really meant to begin at the beginning, as one does in a story, and as I insisted on when I asked for your *Odyssey* on that first placid evening as we sat by the fire and talked of so many things. But my heart came into my mouth, and I blurted out my tragedy before its way was prepared. Now you know the worst, and there is a horrid sort of happiness in sharing one's misery, so

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I can retrace each step of my Via Dolorosa with unflinching feet. The whole wretched business centers around that man Hawley. Why did he come into my life before you, David? I care not whose the contrivance, it was but a sorry scheme."

✓She gazed mournfully at the sea, and her eyes dwelt on a golden track spread over the intensely blue waters by the setting sun. The island of Tirez showed as a faint blur of deep blue with the merest fringe of vivid purple, on the otherwise unbroken line to the west, and the sky was a glory of bright colors, blue fading into green, green into amber, and amber into the russet glow of the sun, with never a cloud flecking the infinite arch, and naught save the white wings of seabirds and the murmur of the tide to disturb the brooding peace of nature.

It was an evening for lovers' vows, not for vain raging against destiny, and Mirabel felt its influences, and sighed.

"Go on, dear," urged David. "Even if it hurts, you must not spare either yourself or me."

"It would be only shirking the real issue if I went again over ground we have often covered," she said, and David bent his head in silent worship of the valiant spirit that lit her face and restored its weary serenity. "You know how my father and I lived, whether in France or Italy, in London or on Lunga. Each year was very like the other, except, perhaps, that we retired even more from the world as I grew older. I have a kind of conviction

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that my father feared just the very thing that occurred. I suppose, David, that I am—shall I say?—fairly good-looking—the sort of girl that men take notice of, and too often express admiration for in a manner that a sensitive woman might resent?”

“Yes, we can grant that.”

For the life of him, David could not keep some note of anguish from creeping into his voice, but Mirabel, flashing an underlook at him, interpreted the admission in a sense flattering to herself. It pleased her, and she flushed a little, for never did woman's face more truly mirror the passing thought than hers.

“Men's stupid oglings and mustache-twistings left me quite undisturbed,” she said. “You see, don't you, that the few glimpses I obtained of the world were so fleeting, and I had been taught so thoroughly to find pleasure in books and in our island solitude, that crowded streets and railway-stations seemed to me more like menageries than places where human beings like myself foregathered. Oddly enough, my father always contrived that I should be well dressed, so I never felt discouraged or humiliated by comparison with other women. He and I moved apart, like stars, but we so closely resembled the remainder of the galaxy that no one seeing us, say, on the platform at Euston, would ever guess that we led such remote and solitary lives. . . . Don't misunderstand me, David. I was very, very

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happy. It was the negative happiness of the bird who knows nothing of the morrow, but it was a state of real bliss in its limited way. Then came a day in last February, when we were longing for May and the Highlands, and Ealing was very sloppy and miserable, and our garden looked like a sparrow in the rain, as if it had lost all interest in life. I had been to a dressmaker, who was overhauling my wardrobe prior to our annual flight to the North, when I fancied that a man was following me. I could not be quite certain, because it was my habit to walk so fast that, if any enterprising youth tried to attract my attention, he soon abandoned the effort, finding that he ran some risk of appearing ridiculous. At any rate, this man certainly did note our house, but he behaved so unobtrusively, otherwise that I would never have given another thought to him if my father had not introduced him to me some five or six days later. His name was James R. Hawley, and he was an American. I recollect my very great surprise at *that*, since my father always avoided Americans more than people of any other nationality. Naturally, we met a few globe-trotters from across the Atlantic at times, in trains and hotels, and they seemed to be rather cheerful folk, always ready for a chat, and eager to offer and receive little civilities; but dad would have nothing to do with them. He is really most kindhearted and urbane—I have known him go miles out of his way to show strangers the shortcut from

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Laghet to Eze—but I have often laughed quietly when he has repulsed the good-natured advances of some citizen of the United States, and I saw that ‘sour-old-John-Bull’ expression creeping over the face of the man or woman rebuffed.”

Mirabel was talking herself into that partial forgetfulness which is a pitiful sign of stupefying sorrow. Not less than others, she was a creature of habit, and each night for a week, when daylight waned, and some simple meal was cooking itself in the kitchen, she and David had lounged outside the house, he smoking and listening, and she chatting freely, just as now, except that he was not smoking, and that she was telling how the “tragedy” of her marriage had come about.

But David, though he treasured each word as a man might prize some rare and precious gift of the gods, even though the gift were shackled by the monstrous stipulation that it would be prodigal in its lavishness for the hour but withheld forever from the morrow, awoke with a start to consciousness of a hard fact, tangible and earth-born, thrusting itself stubbornly through a mist of grievous romance. Mirabel had the faculty of making scenes live in her words. Her light vignettes of Ealing on a wet day, of shallow London cads, of the glimpses she had caught of the world outside Lunga, were charming in their vagueness; now, all at once, she had etched a picture in strong lines and harsh shadows. Why should Locksley, whose studious avoidance of his

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fellowmen imposed an even higher wall of seclusion, a still deeper moat of distrust, where Americans were concerned—why should he admit to his house an American who had obviously discovered his whereabouts by tracking Mirabel? Was there some clew in that faded signature on the flysheet of the *Elzevir Virgil*? “Alex. J. Forbes, Harvard Univ.” David had not forgotten the angular, scholarly script. He was sure he would recognize it, or its like, again, unless many years dimmed the tablets of his brain before comparison became possible.

The odd notion that here was a definite thing where all else was indefinite flitted through his mind as speedily as his eye could discern a black fang of rock revealed for an instant by some chance swirl of the current sweeping into the westerly curve of the Corran; but Mirabel, acutely responsive to his slightest mood, knew that she had said something that stirred him, that he hung on her words as though they had a significance she was certain they did not possess.

“I ought to explain, perhaps,” she said, “that my father and mother were married in America. Each was of true Highland descent, but they met in Boston. To my regret, dad would never talk of those days. He grieved so terribly over my mother’s death that he found refuge, solace perhaps, only in silence. And then, about that time, soon after her death, I mean, he slipped on the rocks near Garavan, a bit of a village close to the Italian frontier beyond

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Mentone, and injured his eyes. I told you of the accident."

"Yes, I remember. That would be fourteen years ago, when you were a little girl of eight."

Mirabel sighed. Her luminous eyes dwelt on him for an instant. How he had garnered each trivial scrap of her history! How intimate and precious was his interest in her. When she spoke again, it was with a tense deliberation, sadly interfered with by tiny runnels of sentiment quickly suppressed, that showed she was flogging herself to the task, for the moments were flying, and, when next the sun rose over Lunga, her all too brief love story would have passed into the limbo of yesterday's seven thousand years.

"From the outset, I disliked Mr. Hawley. He was too gracious, and fawned on me in every sentence. You didn't, David. You thought I was a vixen—ill-mannered, unchristian."

"How old is Hawley?" he broke in, catching at any straw to save both from drowning.

"He says he is thirty-two, but he looks younger. He is very fair, almost a Dane in appearance, and that type of man maintains a boyish aspect longer than other men. He has white eyes, glassy and impenetrable. Macdonald is only thirty-six, but Mr. Hawley would pass for his son, so far as mere guessing at age goes. . . . And now I can tell you in very few words what has brought about my present predicament. Hawley became a constant visitor.

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When we came here he wrote long letters, which Donald brought from the mainland with our stores. At last, to my bewilderment, though I kept silent, my father invited him to the island. And then, one day, he told me that I must marry Mr. Hawley."

"But why? In Heaven's name, why?"

"Heaven had nothing to do with it. If poor little Lunga figures on the maps in Paradise, it must have been overlooked recently. . . . No, David, I don't quite mean that. It is worse than impious, it is untrue. Someone up there thought of Lunga again ten days ago, but forgot what had happened in the meantime. . . . My father urged that he was growing old, and that I could not remain alone in the world. I replied that I detested Hawley beyond any man I had ever seen. Then . . . oh! it was hard, but you have a right to know . . . then, my father, whom I loved, and still love most dearly, became very angry, and demanded my obedience, and when I still refused, for the spirit of resistance was hot and sore within me, he broke down and grieved so bitterly that I promised to do anything to comfort him. But—there were conditions. . . . David, I want you to imagine some part of my miserable little tale. . . . I—cannot—tell you—all."

"Hawley, of course, swore to fulfill certain pledges, and broke his vow."

She did not seem to notice how thick his voice had become.

"Yes—and no. I must be just, but a woman

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knows when a man is honorable—at any rate, when he means to be honorable. Looking back now at the events of those dismal weeks, I cannot understand why my father plotted and planned with Hawley. He must have done so. Hawley went away early in September, and we traveled south on the 2d of October. You will hardly credit it, David, but I was married on the 6th, and was only given a few hours' notice. . . . No, don't interrupt me now, or I shall never get you told. Didn't you say something once about a man who could run twenty-five miles, but would topple over if he met the least obstacle in the last mile or two? Well, I have gone far to-day. . . . The ceremony took place before a registrar. I was glad of that. There is a lovely and sacred aura about a church that would have been smirched and profaned by such a marriage. . . . For the sake of appearances, Mr. Hawley and I were to go to Paris for the honeymoon. . . . Ugh, how I hate the word! Then we were to live with dad at Ealing, and existence was to go on just as before. I believe I cried, and, at the last moment, when the carriage was at the door to take us to Charing Cross, I snatched up Carlo in my arms, and refused to go without him. Mr. Hawley left me alone while we drove to the station, but his white eyes terrified me when we were alone in our reserved compartment. I thought of the long journey, and the hotel, with its smooth, complacent Swiss managers and waiters, and I am sure I went a lit-

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tle mad, because I suffered Hawley to put his arm around me and kiss my cheek through my veil, for I wore a veil that day, to stop other women from seeing that I had been crying. . . . And all the time I was scheming, thinking; my wits made agonized rushes this way and that, just as the terrified rabbits must have run to and fro when Donald thrust those nasty ferrets into their burrows. . . . I must have acted rather well, though, for Hawley fancied I meant to—to endure him; because once or twice, when I saw a yellow gleam in his eyes, and I turned to look out of the window lest I should scream and try to tear him with my hands, he laughed at what he called my shyness. . . . At Dover, I could bear it no longer. I didn't want to die, David, and if I had gone to Paris, it meant death. Yes, I do mean that. I knew the hotel we were going to, and it has a staircase which looks sheer down from the eighth story to a marble floor. . . . I picked up Carlo in my arms, and told Hawley that he must stay and look after our hand-baggage while I ran ahead and secured sheltered seats on the steamer. He was sure of himself now, so he raised no objection. He little guessed that Dover pier was so familiar to me; it is one of the main streets of my queer world; so, while he was searching the vessel, I was at the Town Station, and seated in a train for London. . . . Then, when my mind grew calmer, I was afraid of what I had done. It was useless to go home, for I felt I could



"I TURNED TO LOOK OUT OF THE WINDOW, LEST I SHOULD SCREAM."

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not undergo a fresh outburst on my father's part. I had plenty of money. After paying all expenses, I still have fifty pounds in the house and some gold in my purse, so I bought a few things in London, and took the night mail from Euston to Edinburgh."

"The marvel is that you were not followed sooner," said David, ready instantly to rescue her from the embarrassment of a recital from which her sensitive nature had shrunk with loathing.

She uttered a mournful little laugh, for joy and grief are strangely akin.

"Ah, but I displayed a woman's guile," she said. "I knew that Mirabel and Carlo, traveling together in a first-class carriage, would be remembered by every guard and ticket-examiner on duty that night. So I booked Carlo from King's Cross, to be called for at Edinburgh by a Miss Smith, and Mirabel took a third-class ticket, and made herself useful to a sailor's wife, with two little children, who was going to live in Leith. Carlo and I journeyed separately to Oban, too, and there I took the precaution of sending a small boy for him to the station. At Oban I was lucky. I met one of my lobster-catchers, and he sailed the pair of us in his boat to Treshnish, where I slept one night in Macdonald's cottage. His wife wanted me to remain, but I dared not, as I knew that the equinoctial gales were due, and, once on Lunga, I believed myself safe for a month at least."

David hoped she might continue, and tell him what vague projects she had formed for the morrow. It

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was futile and cruel to question her, but she sat in silence for a little while, patting the dog, who had jumped contentedly into her lap when he heard her talking in an ordinary tone. When she did speak, she surprised him.

"Will you go with Donald to the mainland, if he starts in the morning?" she asked.

"No," he said.

"Why not? My father will only quarrel with you. He will resent your presence."

"When I leave Lunga I sail away in the *Fire-fly*."

"But she is not seaworthy."

"I shall make her sufficiently so, at any rate, to reach Oban with a favorable wind."

"David," she cried, and her eyes sought his with a pathetic tenderness, "for my sake, you will not create strife! I see my duty clearly now. You will not cause me to wish that I had died in Paris after that woeful journey from London?"

"God forbid!" he muttered, and not another word could he say.

"Then let us make the most of our last evening together. We must hurry to an Argos that reeks of Donald's stew. Then we shall all sit in the moonlight, and, mad as it sounds, I shall sing you some quaint old ballads, for I feel that I can sing to-night as I have never sung before. Isn't there a verse in the Psalms that says, 'They that sow in tears shall reap in joy'? Well, then, I place faith in that promise. Don't ask me to explain, for I

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cannot. Let me rather discourse of my repertoire. It ranges from a *serena* of Mistral's to a Highland lament. Must I tell you that a Provençal *serena* is not a serenade, but a little poem that breathes of longing for night and the beloved. . . . Ah, my dear one, does my folly hurt you? Forgive me, David. I have so much to say, and the dawn cometh, but there may be no day-star to rise in our hearts! Let me talk, then, no matter how wildly, for there is some nerve or chord in my brain that threatens to stretch and break if I do not keep it vibrating with sound. And that is why I want to sing. I have read somewhere that Italian criminals, denied the silence of death, go mad when subjected to perpetual silence in life."

She cried again a little, and that brought relief, and she was silent enough as David led her up the steep path from the Corran, and guided her over the rough way as she had once guided him.

But now there was no gale to buffet and bellow at them. Lunga, that evening, might well have figured on a map in Paradise, for earth could reveal no more restful spot.

CHAPTER X

IN THE MIDDLE WATCH

THEIR mournful pilgrimage to Argos was interrupted by the jackdaw, who waylaid them from a gully on Cruachan. He hopped out suddenly, gave them an astute, one-eyed glance, and croaked "Hello!"

They disregarded him, or tried to. Even Carlo trotted along with an air of complete detachment.

"Oh, ho!" said the bird, and he sprang in front with long, rapid leaps, being, so to speak, peckish.

Even a little thing like that served to restore Mirabel's equipoise, for she was sound in body and sane in mind, and had a good deal of that cavalier spirit which helps men, and women too, to accept bad fortune with a cheery smile rather than revile it. David knew instantly that his supporting arm was no longer necessary, and withdrew it. She was grateful for his tact, but she only uttered the first banal words that came into her head.

"Don't you find Jack rather uncanny?" she said.

"I have never before met a bird with such a terse vocabulary. . . . When you come to think of it, 'Hello!' and 'Oh, ho!' sum up life."

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“Mèry, the French poet, puts the same idea briefly enough. Do you know the lines?—

“Un jour de fête,
Un jour de deuil,
La vie est faite
En un clin d’œil.”¹

“Certainly, Jack does remind one of a Frenchman,” said David.

“You are the poorest sort of actor,” she said, with a wan smile.

“Are you capable of judging? I thought you had never seen a play.”

“Nor have I, but I have managed to read a few. The stage directions always interested me. ‘Slow music,’ ‘thunder,’ and that sort of thing. The best of all is Shakespeare’s ‘alarums and excursions.’ We have not lacked such accessories on Lunga.”

She halted for a moment, and looked across the low-lying southern half of the island to the oddly-shaped Bach Mòr, or Dutchman’s Cap. On its easterly side its basalt cliffs and conical hill were black and gray in the shadows, but every outstanding spur and weather-beaten rock on the west was

¹ The following is a fair translation of Mèry’s verse:

One day we smile,
One day we sigh,
Life passes while
We wink an eye.

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bedizened in crimson and gold by the last rays of the sun.

"Nature's tragedies are quite pitiless," said David, still striving to keep pace with her changing moods. "In teaching us to admire her beauty, she blinds us to her calamities. Every boulder on the foreshore was wrenched from the rock on which we stand, and nature's end for each bird and beast is death by starvation, unless the affair is hastened by murder."

"We all kill to live. The cattle browsing up there in the glen slay herbs and grasses innumerable. Even dry seeds are tenacious of life. I remember my father planting some wheat taken from a mummy's cerecloths, and quite a crop was raised."

"Have you been in Egypt, then?"

"Yes. We cruised in the Mediterranean one winter, and went up the Nile to Assouan. But I remember little of it. I was only a tiny mite of seven or eight, and dad said afterwards that even one's own dahabeeyah was not safe from prying tourists with their cameras."

David growled something under his breath.

"How strange that neither of us should have remembered your promise during all these days," continued Mirabel, suddenly stricken by his thought—that the pictures he meant to take were still in the embryonic stage of the rolled film.

"There is every indication of a fine day to-morrow," began David.

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"We shall have no to-morrow," broke in Mirabel, and then he recalled Locksley's prohibition of photography.

"Don't forget that the tides run nearly an hour later," he said.

They were hurting each other dreadfully, and they knew it, but of such fine sacrifices is love made; by this battledore and shuttlecock of small-talk each was making believe that the ravages of the past hour were not, or, if that was asking too much, even from one's beloved, that time might heal.

"One last question before we sniff Macdonald's stew," said Mirabel, diving headlong into the previous day's airy manner. "Why are you remaining here?"

"Whether Mr. Locksley likes it or not, I wish to make his acquaintance. I seem fated to thrust myself on members of your family."

"But, David—he will surely resent your presence at Argos."

"I resume my old quarters to-night."

"On the yacht?"

"Yes."

She put a hand to her breast for an instant, and breathed, "Oh, David, my dear!" That was all. They were visible from the kitchen window, and Mirabel was learning the sweet uses of convention. Even on solitary Lunga one fisherman was the world.

During dinner, after a watchful glance or two, Macdonald acknowledged himself beaten. The others

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could tell the exact moment when he vowed in unutterable Gaelic that no man could understand a woman, for Mirabel chatted with her wonted freedom, and told an old story in a new guise against Donald that made David laugh. It seemed that some of the lobster-men were invited to tea one day, and a table was laid in the Dorlin. But the sugar was forgotten, and Donald was deputed to ask Célestine for a supply. She, busy with something else, and thinking there was no hurry, paid no heed, whereupon Donald repeated his demand, and the lively Frenchwoman cried, "Tout de suite, M'sieur Mac; tout de suite!" "Too sweet, ye daft creetur, have I no tellt ye it isna sweet at a'?" roared Donald.

"Dash me!" he now cried good-humoredly, "I dinna ken noo whatt there wass tae laugh at. She said it. She said it."

Even Mirabel herself laughed then, and the jack-daw helped. Macdonald scratched his head.

"Gosh!" he muttered, "I'll be thinkin' they French wor-r-ds maun hae anither meanin'!"

"How long?" cried David.

"Two years," said Mirabel.

"Nevertheless, a surgical operation was avoided."

"Please recollect that I, too, am a Highlander."

"Then you shouldn't tell funny tales. Should she, Donald?"

"Man, but it's glad I am tae see Miss Meerabel in the humor," said the fisherman.

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He, poor fellow, could no more forget the morrow than a woman could fail to remember the dress she was married in. But Mirabel rallied bravely.

“Can you be the same Donald who once applauded the history of Madame Roland?” she cried. “‘Eh, but she was a grand woman!’ you said when you heard that she had never been more witty than on the night before her execution. Even at the foot of the guillotine she jested, and saved an unhappy man the horror of seeing her beautiful head cut off by asking the executioner to take him first.”

“Eh, fecks!” grumbled the fisherman, who evidently regarded with suspicion the last request of the irresistible Girondist.

So they were quite a lively party, and Mirabel did sing as they sat outside in the moonlight, for the October night was mild in that humid west, and the sea, which all day had smiled at the sun, now took moon and stars into more discreet embrace.

David surrendered without reserve to the influences of the hour. He could strum the banjo skillfully, and was seldom at a loss to improvise an accompaniment once Mirabel had hummed a tune. When he expressed surprise at the extent of her knowledge of Provençal music, she explained that her father took her on three occasions to the revived *Jeux Floraux*, or Poetic Festivals, which have become features of national life in the *Basses Alpes* and *Bouches du Rhône*. At first it struck him as noteworthy that she should have kept this particu-

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lar talent hidden on other evenings. Then she was eager to hear the popular songs of the day, and oft-times amused him by the facility with which she could pick up some music-hall air and adapt it to lyrics of her own, if he could not recall the words. But soon he realized the motive underlying this astonishing change. Jasmin, Mistral, and Aubanel wrote for lovers, and Mirabel had fancied that she scorned love, until the awakening came.

To please Donald, she interpolated a few Highland ballads, but such plaintive melodies accorded ill with her present exaltation of spirit, and mostly she sang the songs of the troubadours.

Suddenly, in the midst of a *pastorella*, wherein a shepherd told his true love that they would be married when the flocks came down from the hills in autumn, she stopped abruptly.

"Good-night, David," she said. "Good-night, Donald. You have your old room;" and she was gone.

Donald tapped his pipe on the stone fence, sure sign that he was about to deliver a weighty utterance.

"She's worrit, puir lass, fair worrit tae death, Sir David," he said. "I dinna haud wi' they meeserable French chanties. Ane auld Scottish vairse is worth a barrow-load o' yon trash. Now, if she'd gi'en us 'Lochiel's Lament,' or 'The Lass o' Ballachulish'—— But, man, there'll be ill-work i' the morn when this Hawley puts his ugly phiz ashore."

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"I had a sort of idea that Hawley was rather good-looking," said Lindsay.

"Aiblins," growled Macdonald, who was really awaiting instructions as to his own attitude next day. Armed with instructions from Mirabel, he would have met the boat that brought Locksley and Hawley from Treshnish, and the latter would certainly be deported to the mainland forthwith—by force, if necessary.

Though Lindsay was sufficient of a Scot to appreciate the man's stiffnecked loyalty, it occurred to him instantly that, if the girl had chosen to keep silent, he dared not interfere. Nor was he willing even to listen to such gossip as Macdonald might want to retail.

"Well, Donald," he said, "I shall see Hawley for myself in the morning. Now I must be shifting my few traps. I'll soon be out of your way, as I suppose Miss Mirabel intended that you should extinguish the lamps."

"Whaur'll ye be gaein', Sir David?" asked the other, in a stage whisper.

"To the cutter."

"Man, there's nae ca' for that. They'll no be here afore seven o'clock."

"I prefer it, thank you."

Lindsay went to his room, and bundled clothes and linen over an arm. Boots and small articles from the dressing-table went into his pockets, and, while thus engaged, he came across the ancient orna-

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ments found in the coracle in a pocket of the blue-
serge coat which he had not worn since the day of
the wreck. The touch of the soft, smooth metal
reminded him vividly of the conditions under which
they were discovered. After lying for many centu-
ries, perhaps a thousand years or more, imbedded
in the rough shingle of Lunga, they had only come
to light again to bridge an epoch in his own life.
For he could never go back to the blithe irrespons-
ibility of the days which seemed so remote, though
not yet a fortnight old. No matter what happened,
his existence must now be divided into two sharply
defined periods. Before he met Mirabel he cared
little whither the winds of chance wafted him. But
now, ah! now, the fragrance of her memory would
abide with him till memory itself fled.

All was still in the house. She must have heard
him moving about in the room, and he was tempted
to give her a farewell hail before passing down the
stairs. He resisted the impulse. There was finality
in her manner of bidding him "Good-night." It
was as though she had said: "This is the end,
David. Think of me as parting from you with
music on my lips. Remember me, but do not
grieve!"

So he spoke a few words to Donald, patted the
sleepy dog, was scrutinized by the jackdaw, through
the barest slit of an eyelid, and went forth into the
night.

The front of the house lay full in the glare of the

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moon, but he did not glance up at Mirabel's window. He paused for a moment to look at the little holes dug in the garden mold by the goats' feet on that day of miracles when first he made the circuit of the island. Not until he saw the animals did he suspect that the island might be inhabited. Goats' feet! How often since had he heard the pipes of Pan! Then he closed the gate, latched it, and swung off along the westerly path.

From the depths of the Harp Rock chasm rose the murmuring boom of the tide; from a secluded glen on the right came the sweet-scented and heavy breathing of cattle chewing the cud while they rested. At times the silver mirror of the sea was broken by tiny circles where a fish leaped, and already the earliest migrants of the duck tribe were fighting. All nature was peaceful, yet amazingly alive. Even a small pebble on the slope of Cruachan obeyed the law, and rolled down a few feet until it lodged against some projecting knob or fell into a crevice. So it would stay there a while—whether an hour or ten thousand years was a matter of complete unimportance—to the pebble.

Often had David, in his wanderings, caught nature in this aspect of waiting, apparently conscious of some tremendous purpose, yet blandly indifferent to such trivialities as why or when; but never before had he detected an element of crouching in the semblance of repose. Even the solid rock threatened movement and utter annihilation, while, as for placid

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sea and motionless air, what smug liars they were, to be sure!

With something of an effort, David shook off the spell of this brooding solitude. His mind turned to the coming day. By this time he had garnered such a store of information as to Mirabel's past life that he could be certain of its main features. Her father's love of seclusion arose from less worthy motives than the desire of a scholar to avoid the vulgar crowd. Locksley obviously discriminated. His special bugbears were Americans and photographers; it needed no profound analysis to determine that he dreaded some discovery which might be brought about by the agency of an American or a photograph.

Yet he was willing, even eager, that his daughter should marry the first American, or professed American, who had succeeded in passing the closely guarded portals of his home. Why? Did the man share with him some disgraceful secret, and use the knowledge as a means of forcing the marriage? Suppose that unpleasant explanation proved true, did it not put an impassable precipice at his, David's feet? He had the scantiest acquaintance with law, and literally none of the statutes affecting matrimony, but he had in full share the Briton's reverence for the marriage tie, and, even if it were possible, under the extraordinary conditions, to get Mirabel's union with Hawley annulled, it was not conceivable that he should bring about that develop-

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ment by proving her father to be a felon, or guilty of whatsoever misdeed it was which made him shun all society.

No; that door was locked irrevocably. If the key were to be had for the taking, he would have passed it by, if for no other reason than the rare and beautiful affection which existed between father and daughter. No cloud had dimmed their sky until Hawley appeared, and the very sacredness of the bond temporarily broken forbade any attempt to wring the truth out of the interloper. Locksley had devoted his life to Mirabel's strange upbringing, and Lindsay was the last man in the world to cavil at the result. In a way, too, she was surrounded with a sort of luxury. There was no lack of means—the two lived where they chose, always subject, of course, to Locksley's craze for aloofness—and the girl had been trained to despise those things which the majority of women sighed for, while she found pleasure in pursuits from which the majority of women were hopelessly excluded by intellectual incapacity. David, being alone, swore freely at the mad jumble of circumstances.

On reaching the Corran, he threw the bundle of garments inside the cabin, filled his pipe, and sat crosslegged on the poop. Sleep he could not—yet. He meant to snatch a few hours' rest before the threatened avalanche fell next morning, but his brain was far too agitated to permit of slumber until long after midnight, and it was now about eleven o'clock.

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The weather was phenomenally mild. He pulled an oilskin over his shoulders, not because of the slightest sense of chilliness, but to ward off a heavy dew. He was lighting his pipe when an unbidden recollection darted through his mind and caused him to glow with annoyance. What an ass he had been to tell Mirabel that silly story about the newly married couple on the Channel steamer!

“And I fancied that she saw in it some hint of our situation at the moment,” he growled. “Good Lord! How blindly self-confident one can be! How little I dreamed of its true application. Poor girl! A week earlier she, another man’s bride, had run from that same steamer as though it held the plague. And so it did! I wonder if Hawley got on board, and was off to Calais before he could make sure that she was missing? Damn Hawley! Shipwrecks and boiler explosions and railway collisions ought to be reserved for his like.”

Another pebble rolled down the cliff and clattered into the commonwealth of the shingle. David felt that he was answered, and rebuked. For good or ill, the Mirabels, and the Davids, and the Hawleys of this world must bow to the supreme intelligence. Joy must be balanced by sorrow; life was a transition like death—no more, no less. Still, he mourned, and, being a stout-hearted young man rather than a philosopher, damned Hawley again.

He lost count of time sitting there. Twice he refilled his pipe, and was thinking of turning in when

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his shikari's instinct warned him of sounds other than the soft splash of the receding tide. His first thought was that they came from the sea, but the swish of feet through the coarse grass of the neighboring plateau brought his searching eyes to that quarter.

He did not move a muscle, for absolute stillness becomes second nature to the hunter and the nomad. In a few seconds he became aware that someone was peeping over the edge of the cliff. A bent figure appeared, and gradually straightened. It was Mirabel, bareheaded, but otherwise dressed as when he had last seen her, with the addition of a short cloak thrown loosely over the white blouse worn for dinner.

By this time the moon had crept behind the Castle Rock, so its slanting beams fell directly on the girl's slender figure, and gave her an ethereal look which was almost disquieting. She did not attempt to approach the path any nearer than that portion of the cliff whence she could obtain a distinct view of the yacht. She stood there, motionless as David himself, and, although his heart thrummed with a sudden wild elation, he did not fail to grasp the essential fact that in his present position, with a black oil-skin humped anyhow across his back, his outline was merged in the barricade of stones he had built on the cutter's starboard side. In a word, Mirabel could see but not distinguish him, and doubtless imagined he was lying asleep in the cabin, and for

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that reason had come stealthily, lest he might be aroused, for he had often told her of his faculty, acquired on the veldt, of waking from sound sleep when there was any unusual movement of man or beast in the vicinity of the camp.

But why had she come? Was she merely restless, and seeking solace in the night air for her disturbed thoughts; or had she been drawn there by some lodestone of the spirit, believing that David, like herself, was uttering a wordless plaint to the moon and stars? Was she pining for companionship? Was she longing to hear his voice again before the day erected its barrier of triple brass? Did her surcharged heart ache for one last assurance of his undying love? Surely no figment of law, unhallowed by the greater law of a discriminating Providence, should restrain him now from her waiting arms. Alas, poor David! All the tortures he had endured since Mirabel thrust him forth from Paradise by telling him of her marriage were concentrated now into one divinely bitter drop of gall and wrath. He was glad to remember afterwards that he did not betray his anguish, yet he took scant credit for a self-control that was merely physical, a trick acquired in savage deserts and tropical forests, where death lurked ever for the unwary. His soul seemed to fuse in a fervor of passion; his eyes, he knew, must have glistened; and his lips, suddenly grown parched, demanded moistening by a tongue apparently swollen and itself dry.

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At that supreme moment, when honor and desire raged and grappled in mortal conflict in the battleground of conscience, it was well that Lindsay's life of adventure had trained eye and ear to act independently, for while his eyes were devouring Mirabel's figure, poised up there in the moonlight like some embodied dream born of romance and the night, his ears caught again the sound which had attracted his attention before she appeared; and now he knew for certain that he was listening to the chug-chug of a small engine.

A glance to the eastward channel showed him the red and green lights of a vessel, a steam-launch in all probability, because the masthead light nearly formed an equilateral triangle with the sidelights. At once he shook himself free from the transport of passion and rebellion which had bewitched him. A vessel of some sort was heading straight for the island, and those on board meant to come close in-shore, since he was sailor enough to realize that she was feeling her way cautiously, and her engines moved only in obedience to the signals of a watchful pilot.

He sprang upright.

"Mirabel!" he cried, low and eager, awaiting her reply before he told her of his discovery, because she could not see the steamer from where she stood, and it was possible, too, that the faint blasts of the exhaust were audible only to one who, like himself, happened to be almost at sealevel.

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She started, uttered a little wail of dismay, and vanished. With a lover's intuition he knew why she ran, and, even while he sped after her across the shingle and up the path, he found a grim humor in the conceit that Mirabel was flying from him only because she was afraid of herself, whereas his sole motive now was to warn her of pursuers whom she did fear most thoroughly and with cruel cause.

When he reached the crest of the cliff she was already halfway to the ridge where he had fixed the tripod. He had good reason to respect her prowess as a runner, but she was tired after a long day of strain, and he gained on her rapidly. As soon as he came within earshot, without incurring any risk,—that is, of being overheard on the approaching vessel, for on such a night sounds would travel distances that might seem incredible during the day,—he called to her.

“Mirabel! Mirabel!”

Still she ran, so he pressed on at the utmost speed attainable on this rugged ground. He dreaded lest she should stumble, but he must overtake her at any cost.

“Mirabel!” he panted again. “For Heaven's sake, stop!”

Then she seemed to understand that her endurance was unequal to the strain, for she turned and faced him.

“Oh, David!” she sobbed, with broken utterance and laboring breast, “why have you followed me?”



"OH, DAVID! WHY HAVE YOU FOLLOWED ME?" *Page 192.*



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. . . If I am weak, my love, you must be strong. . . .
Let me return to Argos, David! . . . I ought not
to have come. . . .”

She swayed, and looked like to fall, but David took her in his arms. She raised a tear-stained, frightened, yet adoring, face to his, and he kissed her squarely on the lips.

“Sweetheart,” he said, “you shall never have cause to fear me. I was sitting on the cutter’s deck, and saw your dear little head the instant it rose above the line of the cliff. I watched you—how long? I cannot tell, nor can you, perhaps—but I would not have stirred hand or foot till you went again, had I not heard and seen a vessel coming to Lunga. It is barely half a mile away, just clear of the Red Reef. Come, my dear one, show that you have not lost trust in me! We must watch these people, and learn their business. For the time we must be scouts, not lovers.”

He kissed her once more, and she gave him a thrill of exquisite delight by putting her arms around his neck and whispering:

“David, you are my own true love. No matter what befalls in the future, believe that, for I shall hide my love from none, and shall proclaim it with my latest breath!”

So David kissed her a third time, and who shall blame him? Yet, six hours earlier, Mirabel had been broken-hearted because of the one fixed and irrevocable fact that David never would kiss her!

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Could it be possible that some well-disposed seraph had chanced upon Lunga in the celestial atlas, and had suddenly decided to give an eye to its affairs? Evidently, something of the sort had happened, or David would never have dared to kiss Mirabel three times in one minute.



CHAPTER XI

WHAT THE MOON DIDN'T SEE

AFTER that passionate avowal Mirabel withdrew herself shyly from David's embrace. With a wrench, they both became sane again.

"A steam-launch coming here at this hour!" she said. "Her occupants are taking a dreadful risk. Even Donald himself would think twice before crossing the reefs by night. Are you sure you are not mistaken, David?"

He laughed softly. His misery had given place to a far more dangerous happiness, for those kisses had sealed Mirabel to him eternally, and he would cede her to no man, for in such wise do young men reason when seized by moon-madness.

"I may have blundered, for my mind was not dwelling on steam-launches," he admitted. "If the vessel exists, she is quite near by this time. Will you come with me to the east side, or would you prefer to remain here while I reconnoiter?"

"A hundred yards count for little in a day's march, dear. Follow me up this gully. We shall cross the saddle in a couple of minutes."

"Ware the skyline, sweetheart. The light is behind us."

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"There is a kink in the path. By dodging behind the rocks we cannot be seen."

They climbed in silence, and David smiled at the girl's quick perception of the first principles of scoutcraft. The track was new to him, but she moved with the silent confidence of a Red Indian stalking an unconscious quarry. Once, on the very crest of Cruachan's northerly slope, they crept a few yards, bent almost double. Then they plunged into deep shadow, and at that instant they saw a small steamer lying under the cliff, within a cable's length of the great boulder named Storm of Storms.

A boat was being lowered, and the squeaking of pulleys would drown any slight noise they made in the descent.

"It is mostly grass here," she whispered. "No loose stones. There is little fear of slipping, if we take reasonable care. . . . The pilot must know Lunga well, as the boat will probably make for the Carrick Fadha—the long landing-rock near the Dorlin, you remember. Shall we hurry and see them land?"

"First, let us make sure of their direction," said the cautious David.

They waited, but Mirabel's guess was right. Though they heard the splash of the boat striking the water, and the rattle of oars and stamping of feet as men climbed overboard, the steamer lay in such a patch of blackness cast by the great bulk of Cruachan that they could not distinguish figures un-

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til the boat drew away from the vessel's hull. It was heading south. There were four men in it—one rowing, one perched in the bows, and two huddled up astern.

“Come, now, and believe,” murmured Mirabel, with just a touch of her wonted sprightliness, leading the way swiftly, and bearing along the side of the hill rather than toward the cliff. Before they had gone many paces, David read her intent. At a point a little higher than the spot whence he had first discovered the house, there was a transverse rent in the rock. Hidden in this, they could survey the whole of the big natural horseshoe, with the building itself and the garden, as well as the Dorlin and the landing-place.

Mirabel whispered instructions, or David would certainly have stumbled more than once in negotiating the pitch-dark depths of the cleft. Arrived at its lip, from which the semicircular cavity fell steeply, David felt about for a smooth ledge.

“Be careful! What are you doing?” she breathed.

“This!” and he drew her gently nearer until she was seated on his knees. “Though you won't admit it, you are dead beat, sweetheart. Now you can sit comfortably, and, if there is need to talk, your voice will not have far to carry.”

She said nothing, but he heard a little sigh of content, and her arm stole around his neck. This love-making was rather wild and reprehensible, but

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David could no more bring himself to regard Mirabel as another man's wife than Pygmalion could look on Galatea as a marble statue. Be that as it may, their billing and cooing was destined to end almost as suddenly as it began.

The boat appeared from behind a broken wall of cliff, and was deftly turned on its keel by the oarsman in order to back up alongside the causeway. One of the men seated aft stood up and leaped ashore. He slipped on a colony of mussels, and fell heavily. The two watchers, threescore yards inland and fully a hundred feet higher, distinctly heard the thump of his body on the rock.

The people remaining in the boat were sympathetic, and the man in the forward part sprang to help the fallen one, but he picked himself up and said angrily:

"I was sure it was a fool's trick to land here, Locksley. How the deuce can you, with your bad eyesight, hope to climb the cliff?"

"Your superior eyes did not avail to keep you upright on a flat stone," said another voice. "I don't purpose climbing any cliff. If you bear a little to the right, you will find a strip of beach leading to the Dorlin."

"I had no idea we would be so late in arriving. I wish now we had waited till the morning."

There was no answer, but the second speaker rose, steadying himself by grasping the rower's shoulder.

"Oh, yes, I admit you urged delay," went on the

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injured one. "But the skipper of that rotten little tub has been going dead slow for nearly an hour. Anyhow, I'll have the satisfaction of telling that skunk, Macdonald, what I think of him. Come along. Give me your hand!"

"No," said the other. "Unless I have your absolute pledge to leave such discussion as is necessary to me, I go straight back to the launch. I am still master here, Mr. Hawley."

"Who's disputing it? Not I. Guess you'd feel a bit sore yourself after a welt like that. Come right along! Now, Graham, take Mr. Locksley's left hand. Easy does it. . . . There you are. . . . Be careful how you walk on those damned shells."

His companion turned to the boatman.

"You need not wait, Graham," he said. "The *Hawk* will drop down a little on the tide, and one of us will hail you in half an hour with orders."

David, sitting up there in the darkness, holding Mirabel in warm embrace, was glad that he had heard the voices of the two men without seeing their features. If asked to explain the feeling, he might have failed. But the fact remained that he preferred to estimate them in that way at the outset.

The older man spoke with the quiet, cultured accents which fall naturally from the lips of a scholar and a gentleman. His manner was restrained and dignified, and it might be assumed that he had only agreed to this midnight visit after protest and argument.

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Hawley, even when allowance was made for irritation and no slight bruises, for his feet had gone clean from under him, and his left shoulder and hip would be black and blue for a week, might be summed up instantly as of a lower order than Locksley. His voice was harsh and strident, but singularly forcible and far-reaching. It reminded David of the vibrant, strenuous, and wholly unmusical speech he had heard in a Broadway bar into which he had gone one day to see the proprietor, a famous ex-pugilist. There, of course, he had listened to New York's choicest slang—which offers insuperable difficulties to the unaccustomed ear,—whereas Hawley's words were rather more than intelligible—they literally compelled attention—but they had the same coarse *timbre*, the same innate brutality, as the utterances of the prizefighter's adherents. That such a suitor for Mirabel's hand should win the favor of the elderly scientist who delighted in hearing his daughter read Virgil was now a thing more than ever monstrous and stupefying. Given a fair field, Hawley might conceivably have won the girl's love and commanded her father's respect by sheer force of character; but, in that event, he would have been called on to surmount steeper rocks than guarded Lunga; yet David knew that he had literally overcome all obstacles from the outset.

It is strange how the mind wanders, even in the gravest of crises. At that moment, despite the strain of overhearing the talk on the rock, David

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thought of the jackdaw, and recalled the wealth of scorn and loathing which that remarkable bird threw into its rendering of Hawley's name. He shook with silent laughter, which Mirabel, whose thoughts were anything but mirthful, interpreted according to her mood.

"I suppose you are thinking of what Donald would say if he heard himself called a skunk," she whispered. "But, David dear, what is to be done? They will arrive at the house in a few minutes, and Donald does not know where I am. I—I could meet them in the morning, David, but not to-night. Oh, my dear, I cannot face them to-night!"

"There is Macdonald's boat. Shall I row you to the mainland?"

"Of what avail is that? It means further pursuit, even scandal, and the wretched jibes of strangers. No, I must dree my weird on Lunga. But to-morrow, not now. If I faced them now, I would scream and say things I might regret forever."

He pressed her closely, as though to reassure her.

"What is your plan, dear? Have you one? Dare I say that I have a right to know?"

"David, I have been searching my very soul all day, and I realize that I can never be that man's wife in other but name. If my father is in his power, I must be told the why and the wherefore. I am not a mere chattel to be bought and sold, even at the whim of one whom I love. If a sacrifice is de-

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manded of me, surely I am worthy of a confidence that my father may share with a man like Hawley. That is all, David—not much light, vague guidance. The path is dark and dim, but the call of duty is clear. If my father's needs warrant the sacrifice, I will endure Hawley to save him, and then, when my sky closes irrevocably, and my ears throb with the sound of deep waters, I shall not hesitate to end my agony in the only possible way.”

David placed a finger on her lips, and drew her soft cheek close to his own.

“You must neither say nor even think such foolish things, dear,” he murmured. “I agree that it is best to tackle an intolerable situation here rather than postpone it uselessly. Now I, too, have been agitating my brains, and I want you to take my advice. No matter when you come face to face with your father, you must urge your just claims. It is hard for me to discuss this matter, so you must bear with me, dear, if I speak plainly. You have already obeyed your father's wishes, and a marriage has taken place which may, or may not, be binding in law. But, as I understand it, there were stipulations, and you ran away on your wedding-day because you feared that those stipulations would not be observed. Insist, then, on remaining with Mr. Locksley. Avoid a definite quarrel, but stick to your guns on that point. Meanwhile, I shall have made the acquaintance of both your father and Hawley,

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and, unless I am grievously in error, I shall be able to deal with the latter in such shape that you will be legally freed from him in a few months."

"Ah, what can you do?"

"It seems to me that money might accomplish much."

"I fear not. I do not know, but I suspect, that my father tried to arrange matters in that fashion when he discovered how bitterly opposed I was to the notion of marriage. And we have plenty of money. Dad once explained to me that, as his heiress, I would inherit eight hundred pounds a year."

David smiled in the darkness. To Mirabel such an income represented an extravagant fortune.

"Still, I have hopes——"

Then his own well-trained hearing, no less than a warning pressure of Mirabel's hand on his shoulder, put an end to their talk for the time.

The low-lying south part of the island was now only a darker blur on the deep-blue plain of the sea. The moon was sinking rapidly, and such light as still streamed over the horizon was shut off by Cruachan and the towering crags on the west. But there was not a breath of wind, and the distant murmur of the tide served rather to enhance than disturb the harmonious stillness of nature.

While Locksley and his companion were yet hidden in the trench of the Dorlin, their footsteps could

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be heard distinctly; then they appeared, spectral shapes in the gloom, hurrying across the few feet of level ground in front of the house.

But there were other alert ears on Lunga that night. No sooner had the two men emerged from the Dorlin than Carlo began to bark loudly.

The sound drew an excited shout from Hawley.

"She's here!" he cried, with an oath that might be pardoned as the expression of a doubt finally set at rest. "That's the dog. He could not get here without her."

"Yes," said the other, in a voice that was either curiously unemotional or thoroughly under restraint. "Nothing would persuade her to abandon the dog."

Hawley did not seem to find the remark comforting.

"Anyhow, you'll be able now to convince yourself that I was not romancing," he said roughly. "She vanished from Dover as completely as if she had fallen down a pit-shaft. I believe you half suspected me of making up the tale to annoy you."

"That was hardly necessary. I was annoyed already."

"Hello, Carlo! Good dog! Don't you know me?"

But Carlo either did not know Hawley, or, knowing him, harbored a thorough-going dislike for him, and kept up a din that threatened developments if the man entered the house in the dark.

"Sorry, Locksley, I ought to have waited to help

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you," he said, though with ill-concealed impatience, when the older man felt his way through the gate. "Perhaps you had better come and speak to this brute. He is vicious with fright, and may attack me."

Locksley came nearer, and the instant his halting pace became audible Carlo's challenge changed to a whine of recognition. Other sounds, not so distinct, came from within the house, but a shrill and piercing whistle identified them with the jackdaw.

Then the listeners on Cruachan heard the click of the sneck, followed by a violent shaking of the outer door.

"A strange thing!" said Locksley. "I have never before known a key to be turned in Argos."

"Knock man, knock! Mirabel must have been aroused by the uproar of the dog, to say nothing of that imp of a bird."

"I didn't lock the door," breathed Mirabel in David's ear.

"Macdonald learnt a bit while with Lovat's Scouts," chortled David.

"But—I don't understand."

"He heard you go out, and was awaiting your return. The moment he became aware of the presence of others on the island he bolted the door, thinking to gain time and gather his wits—possibly hoping to warn you by reason of the racket. I rather fancy you will find that Mac is very sound asleep."

David had read the situation accurately. A good

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deal of banging on the door and more noise by dog and jackdaw were needed before an upper window was raised and a slow voice inquired:

“Wha's there?”

“You know quite well ‘wha's’ here!” cried the irate Hawley. “Who the deuce do you expect would be here but those whom you humbugged——”

The speaker stopped suddenly. It was probable that he had recalled his undertaking to Locksley, who now said quietly:

“Is Miss Mirabel here, Donald?”

“Aye, she'll be here,” came the answering growl.

“Very well, then. Tell her that I have arrived. Then come down and light a lamp, and let us in.”

There was a long wait.

“Surely Mirabel herself is stirring by this time,” said Hawley, breaking a silence which was evidently proving irksome.

“Possibly she is in no real hurry to meet you.”

“Say, Locksley, I've stood a heap more than most men would put up with——”

“Ah, be quiet! You try my patience too severely.”

Hawley evidently fumed. He walked to and fro on the sharp setts of the pathway, and Carlo signaled the fact by a fresh outburst.

Macdonald appeared again, at the bedroom window.

“I'm thinkin' Miss Meerabel will hae gone out,” he said.

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"Gone out!" echoed two voices, and Locksley went on, in a sterner tone than he had used hitherto:

"Cease this fooling, Donald. What do you mean?"

"She's no i' the hooss."

"When did you last see her?"

"I canna tell rightly."

"Oh ——!" cried Hawley.

"Come downstairs and open the door," said Locksley, and Donald could but obey.

Now David, in his campaign against the Boers, had picked up a few "schlim" dodges in the art of disconcerting an opponent; chief among these, though applied by many a strategist before De Wet or Delarey attained fame, was that of cutting off a detachment from its supports when the said detachment firmly believed that any possible enemy was not within the sphere of operations.

"Do you know this vessel, the *Hawk*?" he whispered.

"No. A tug was chartered years ago to bring the materials for the house from Oban, but her name was the *Earl of Montrose*," said Mirabel.

"The men will all be strangers to you, too?"

"I suppose so. That man, Graham, is."

"You don't want to be rushed off to the mainland and London to-morrow, sweetheart?"

"David, how can you ask?"

"Come with me to the edge of the cliff. Mac-

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donald will surely badger the inquirers for another five minutes."

"What do you mean to do?"

"Send that launch back to the place she came from."

"But how?"

"No time for explanations. Hurry, there's a dear! Please pilot me again. I must avoid a tumble now more than at any other time in my life."

After a brief scramble, they reached the summit of the small promontory overlooking the Carrick Fadha. The steamer was anchored not fifty yards away, easing the strain on her cable in a bad holding-ground by an occasional turn of the propeller.

"Ship ahoy!" shouted David, making a megaphone of his hands.

"Ahoy there!" came the answering hail.

"Is that the *Hawk*?"

"Aye."

"You are to put Mr. Locksley's and Mr. Hawley's baggage ashore in the Dorlin, and then return to Mull. The gentlemen will send orders by Macdonald of Calgary when they want you. Where will Macdonald find you?"

"At Tobermorey. The baggage, did ye say? Will ye be meanin' the bit portmanties?"

"Yes, of course."

"An' whatt'll be yer name, mister?"

"David Lindsay."

"Not Sir David Lindsay, of the *Fire-fly* cutter?"

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and the unseen speaker's voice clearly expressed his amazement.

"Yes."

"Gosh! but that's gr-reat, Sir David. Yer man jumped until the forefoot of the trawler that struck yer boat, an' reported you and his mate deid."

"Poor Farrow was killed, but I am all right. Get someone to telegraph the news to the Royal Yacht Club, Cowes. That is all. Macdonald will bring orders."

"One wor-r-d, Sir David. Is the young leddy a' recht?"

"Absolutely. She is here at this moment."

"Good-by, *Hawk!*" cried Mirabel, entering into the spirit of the thing.

"Good-by, miss. Better not bide ower lang on Lunga. We're like tae hae anither bit blaw anny day."

Anxious moments passed while the newcomer's belongings were tumbled into the boat. To make sure there would be no hitch, David ran down to the Dorlin—indeed, he nearly fell into it—and received two leather portmanteaux. He gave the sailor who came ashore a sovereign "to pay for the telegram," and, by the time he had rejoined Mirabel on the cliff, the *Hawk* was taking a wide detour to avoid the Red Reef.

Meanwhile, there was a light in Argos, and Macdonald was stubbornly denying any knowledge of Mirabel's whereabouts, and quite stolidly refusing

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to give any explanation of his own visit to the island that morning, other than his desire to gratify the "young leddy's" wish to replenish her stores as soon as the weather permitted.

✓ Hawley, bottling up his wrath with difficulty, was for an instant search, but Locksley vetoed the notion as fantastic, saying that Mirabel had evidently been on the lookout, and was hiding somewhere. She would be quite safe, and would probably return to the house as soon as she realized that they meant to remain.

"I have a sort of notion that she has gone in this fellow's boat," said Hawley, giving the impassive fisherman a furious glance.

"Is that so, Donald?" demanded Locksley, who knew that Macdonald would not tell a downright lie, no matter how he might fence with their questions. "Where is your boat?"

"On the Corran. Miss Meerabel canna handle yon heavy coble by hersel'," grunted Donald.

"But she may have tried to. Go and see."

"I'll come with you," said Hawley.

"Man, ye'd better bide here. Ye'll brek yer neck on Lunga on a dark necht, wi' the mune set, an' a'."

"I insist——"

"Stay here, Hawley," said Locksley. "Donald will not waste time, and, if he says his boat is at its anchorage, you can believe him."

Donald swung out, and there was evidently some talk as to the *Hawk*, because Hawley made his way

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cautiously to the cliff, only to find that the little steamer was a mile or more out at sea.

"This infernal place is bewitched!" he gasped aloud, when the truth slowly dawned on him that the vessel was steaming away to the northeast. He returned to the house, evoking fresh protests from Carlo, and that was the last Mirabel or David heard of him that night.

"Oh, I am so tired!" sighed the girl. "I suppose every woman has nerves, David, and mine have revealed their existence to-day. But there is no sense in giving way to them. Don't you think we ought to meet Donald and tell him to come for me when—when they are asleep?"

"No," he said cheerily. "I am in command, dear, so you must just do as you are bid. To-night you sleep on board the *Fire-fly*, while I mount guard at the foot of the path. By the time we reach the Corran, Donald will be halfway back, and a very puzzled man, too, not knowing what has become of us. Meanwhile——"

It was so dark that he had lifted her in his arms before she realized his intent. She began to protest, but he silenced her with a kiss—and carried her the whole halfmile to the beach, rejoicing in his burthen, and experiencing no trouble with regard to the rough ground, because his daily visits to the well had familiarized him with every inch of the way. Moreover, was he not treading on air?

He half expected a question or two with reference

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to the facts blurted out during his brief colloquy with the skipper of the launch. But never a word said Mirabel, and he convinced himself readily that his title had fallen unheeded on her ears. Poor girl! She had entered that day into a new realm, and her surcharged brain refused to register fresh impressions.

Soon she was tucked up in the bunk he meant to have occupied himself, but, before allowing her to close her eyes, he knocked the head off a bottle of wine and made her drink a little. Then he hauled out a couple of oilskins, spread one on the shingle in the exact place where he had dropped exhausted after the yacht struck, covered himself with the other, and was sound asleep in five minutes.

He awoke with the dawn, peeped in at Mirabel, ascertained that she was sleeping peacefully, and strode off to the house. Here Macdonald was already astir, but the only sign of bewilderment that hardy cateran vouchsafed was to scratch his head when David walked softly up to the open door. Carlo was tied to a table-leg, for the fisherman knew that the dog would track Mirabel at once, if let run loose. Even now the animal had to be silenced speedily, because of his joy at sight of David.

"Ye were no in the cutter last necht?" muttered Donald, when he had obeyed Lindsay's whispered instructions, and brought the portable oil-stove, a kettle, a coffeepot, and various small stores.

"Not until you had come back from the Corran.

WHAT THE MOON DIDN'T SEE

But we are aware of everything that took place. Keep the pair of them here another hour, at least. If necessary, say that Miss Mirabel will come here then if they are content to wait. You will find a couple of Gladstone bags in the Dorlin. Fetch them, and say exactly that which is true—you suppose they were left there by the men who brought our visitors ashore. Good-by, Mac. You behaved splendidly last night. Keep the dog quiet till I have gone. He will soon see his mistress again.”

Donald jerked a thumb in the direction of the ceiling.

“Yon Hawley med a bonnie to-do aboot the steamer makkin’ off. He blethered a lot, an’ ca’d us Scoatch folk a’ the daft beggars he could lay his tongue tae, but I’m thinkin’, Sir David, that mebbe a sort of a Scot like yersel’ was a bit ower mich for him last necht.”

“Scotland forever! That is the password.”

And David crept off with his loot.

CHAPTER XII

WHEREIN THE HORIZON WIDENS

SINCE the cutter had been hauled much closer under the cliff bordering the Corran than the spot where she lodged when David fell on the shingle in a stupor of exhaustion, she could only be seen from one small hump of Cruachan. Thence, by looking closely, the *Fire-fly's* hull appeared through the little gap cut by the path.

As Mirabel was on board, David, of course, took the right place in his stride, looked closely, and saw her standing in the yacht's well, for she, too, was accustomed to rise with the sun, and was no laggard this fine morning.

In the clear light of the hour after daybreak he made out that her hair was unfastened. She waved a hand to him, and forthwith disappeared into the cabin, but, as she turned, he did not fail to note that the golden-brown tresses streamed over her shoulders almost to the waist-line of her white blouse.

Whether or not Mirabel intended that he should become aware of the length of her locks was one of those questions which she alone could decide. At

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any rate, her innocent coquetry brought a curious pallor to his bronzed cheeks.

He halted, and looked back, half fearing, half hoping that the man who claimed Mirabel as wife should be following him. But Hawley was still sleeping, since he, like every other person whose thoughts centered in Lunga, had endured twenty long hours of excitement the previous day.

The only pair of eyes David encountered were those of a well-disposed bullock, who surveyed him with mild inquiry from behind a rock.

Then he laughed at the spasm of jealousy which had racked him. He knew the readiness of cattle to adopt a daily routine, and it was his habit each morning to draw fresh water for the trough near the well; the placid beast now peering at him was doubtless wondering why this new friend should turn up on the wrong side of the island.

He went to the well, filled the kettle, and replenished the trough. By the time he had reached the Corran, Mirabel was awaiting him.

"I guessed," she said, nodding at the array of utensils, and smiling delightfully, though her face was rather white, and her eyes, in that tender purple effulgence which heralds a glorious sunrise, held the exquisite tint of Parma violets. "I discovered where you had slept, and knew you were conducting a foray, so I took the opportunity to make a toilette of sorts."

"So I saw," he said.

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She blushed from the roots of her hair to the neck of her blouse.

"You couldn't," she protested, ignoring the signal with which she had welcomed him.

"Well, I thought I did. But the really vital matter is that you are a distinct wash ahead of me."

"You don't imagine that I shall allow you to cook our breakfast! Outspan at once—is that the right way to put it? There is always a lovely pool left by the tide behind that little ledge of rock over there, and I have rummaged your lockers already for salt-water, soap, and towels. I give you twenty minutes. Are we to be allowed to eat in peace?"

"I sought Donald's aid. He will secure us an hour at least—if necessary, with a hammer."

"David, you must look on me as a most unfilial daughter. But I dread meeting my father, though that which is simply disagreeable this morning was something wholly beyond my powers last night. And we were both a little mad, were we not?"

"My case remains desperate. I shall never recover."

She stooped to examine the reservoir in the oil-stove. He noticed that she was keeping out of reach. There was to be no kissing by daylight.

"You ought not to say such things to an unsophisticated island maid, Sir David Lindsay," she said.

Then David gathered soap and towels, and sought the seapool, but he whistled cheerfully as he went,

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because, whether mad or sane overnight, if Mirabel had not missed the significance of the parley between himself and the skipper of the launch, she certainly could not have forgotten anything else that occurred.

Happily, these two were not afflicted with nerves. Though Mirabel was on the threshold of a wretched day, she ate an excellent meal, and David cracked his third egg amiably.

"It is odd," he said, "how the keen air of early morning brings out the aroma of coffee. If people were wise, they would always breakfast out-of-doors when the weather permitted."

"People are not wise," said Mirabel.

"There are exceptions. For instance——" and he tendered his cup for more coffee.

"We did not display much wisdom last night, David. I feel like a naughty child. How shall I explain this escapade to my father? I cannot admit that I was afraid to meet him, though it would be the truth."

"Tell it, then, and shame Hawley."

"But what if dad says I ought to have trusted him?"

"You disposed of that argument yesterday. Confidence, to be warranted, should not be wholly one-sided. You were tricked into marriage with a man whom you despised, so it is you who have been unfairly treated, not your father or Hawley."

"I wish I could enter the lists with some share

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of your bold spirit, Sir Knight—or should I say Most Worshipful Baronet?”

“May I tell you now why I kept my title a secret?” he asked.

“No, please,” she said quietly, and her eyelids drooped so that her eyes were hidden under the curved lashes.

“Then we revert to the more immediate topic. My fixed belief is that you should make a firm stand on the question of remaining constantly with Mr. Locksley. It was easy to see last night that there was no love lost between him and Hawley. Your father will hardly turn against you so completely as to deny you the shelter of his roof. If he does, if Hawley's influence is so strong that it predominates, you must let me take you to my sister, and the subsequent wrangle can safely be left to the lawyers.”

“The law cannot help me, David, and it may destroy my father. I know nothing of his early life, but I am sure now that the wicked man who has caused so much suffering has a hold over him that renders an appeal to the law impossible.”

“Mirabel dear, you, like myself, are seeking in the dark for an explanation of an outrageous thing. We shall not find it unaided, but I am convinced that the man whom I heard checking and controlling that pinchbeck Yankee from the first moment he fell ashore will not tolerate high-handed measures in your

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instance. I want to be fair; the plea of age and failing health put forward by your father for your marriage was reasonable enough, but it is a different matter when you come to him and say that the very thought of Hawley as a husband is repulsive. The days have passed when a girl could be forced into such a union for the rest of her life. Compulsion of that sort is not sanctioned by public opinion, and I doubt very much if it will be upheld by the law. At any rate, by following my advice, you gain time, which is all-important."

"Why?"

"It gives me the chance of dealing with Hawley. I think the fellow is a mere adventurer. He is not an American at all, I fancy, or, at best, one of a quite inferior variety."

"But he speaks with an American accent."

"Few characteristics are more easily assumed."

"My father says he knew him years ago in the United States."

"He may think he knew him because Hawley says so. I am inclined to discredit the statement. Mr. Locksley is a man who must invariably have associated with gentlemen. His manner, his speech, his mode of life, prove conclusively that Hawley could not have been an intimate friend. Don't forget that refined and well-educated society exists on the one side of the Atlantic as well as on the other. The Americans one meets in New York or Boston laugh

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at the delusions of the average Briton on that subject."

Mirabel's head was bent, and she seemed to weigh David's words gravely, as though he had suggested some idea that demanded consideration.

"Mr. Hawley claims to be a Philadelphian," she said, after a pause. "In the—in the register—he gave an address in a street in Philadelphia. . . . I didn't pay much heed, but I remember that."

"By Jove! Did he?" And David whistled impolitely in his astonishment.

"What of it?" cried Mirabel.

"I'm not quite sure, but I rather imagine that his declaration of nationality makes *you* an American."

"My father took care that the notices were perfectly in order. He told me so."

"Naturally, but don't you see, sweetheart, if you are legally a citizen of the United States, you come under American law? This business threatens to be even more complicated than I imagined. It is beyond me. Mirabel, you simply *must* assert your absolute freedom until the affair has been properly investigated by my solicitors."

"It seems to me, David, that you can deal with the tangle so much more effectually than I that you ought to come with me, and give me your support—for the first interview, at any rate."

"I am only waiting to be asked!" he cried. "And

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now that the sun is peeping over the hills, let me see if a camera will do you any sort of justice."

Despite her troubles, the essential woman in her was aroused.

"Oh, David, not in this untidy dress!" she declared.

"Lost opportunities seldom forgive," he said, and the day was not far distant when he had good reason to bless the axiom and its moral.

He arranged a reel of films in the camera, which had reposed forgotten in a locker during so many days, and posed Mirabel in varying lights. When the first film was exhausted he obtained a second, and tried a few time-exposures. At last, having taken a dozen pictures, for three of which he had used a special lens for half-length portraits, he put the rolls in his pocket and locked the camera in its receptacle. He was lighting a pipe when Mirabel saw Donald swinging over the shoulder of Cruachan with long strides, and the terrier scampering in front.

David looked at his watch.

"Nearly an hour and a half," he said. "There have been ructions at Argos."

The dog's joy at sight of his mistress was one of those trivial things which probe to the very roots of human emotions, but, if Mirabel's eyes glistened, she did not weep. She had done with tears. A woman of her strong and rare character seldom

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makes that concession to sex, or, if she grieves, she permits none to see.

Donald's message was to the point.

"Yon Hawley is naethin' but a gomerall," he said, "an' I could keep him speerin' an' bogglin' a month o' Sundays, but Mr. Locksley just up an' sez to me, 'Donal,' sez he, 'bring Miss Meerabel here at once.' Ye ken there's nae hagglin' aboot Mr. Locksley, an' I'm no gleg wi' ma tongue."

David kept a cheerful face during that short walk to the house, but he did not endeavor to hide from himself the doubts that surged through his brain. The glamor of midnight and the moon had gone, and in the cold light of day it was not so easy to determine on the most judicious course. He was still stanchly of opinion that it was better to brave the storm than fly from it, but that article of faith would not serve of itself to extricate Mirabel from her plight. These two men, her father and her husband, had come to Lunga on an errand the reasonableness of which it was impossible to dispute. She must go back with them to that pulsing world which had seemed so distant and unreal since he himself was plucked from it by the storm. He could neither cavil at their purpose nor prevent it; even now he wondered whether or not he had done right in sending away the launch, a ruse which could only delay their departure by a few hours.

He had the habit of stroking his chin when perplexed, and his assumption of nonchalance could not

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have been markedly successful, for once, when his hand went up in that tell-tale gesture, Mirabel smiled.

“Does my knight hear the snorting of the dragon?” she said, catching his arm for an instant, but as rapidly letting go, as if conscious that the time for such lover-like *tendresses* had passed.

“Is that what it is?” he asked. “I have bearded lions in their dens, or in their lairs, to be accurate, but dragons are new game. I was really thinking, sweetheart, that, when your father built a modern Argos, it would have been decidedly useful if he had set up an oracle as well.”

“The way, then, is not quite so clear now as it was during breakfast?”

“Mirabel,” he said, meeting her gaze with eyes that did not flinch from her pathetic scrutiny, “I have no manner of doubt as to the line you must follow. It is for myself I quake. Pray Heaven I may not be tempted to fling Hawley into that ghastly chasm!” and he pointed to the stark cleft from whose hidden recesses came the plaint and murmur of the tide.

“Nay, David!” she cried, “I have a better conceit of prayer to Heaven than that. I shall not petition the All-seeing and All-wise to restrain you from crime, for you are incapable of it, even for my sake, but I shall ask humbly on my knees that the clouds may pass from our lives, for I cannot find it in my heart to believe that Providence has

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ordained that we should part. There were other isles than Lunga to which that gallant little *Fire-fly* might have ferried you in safety. Is it my turn to act as comforter? If so, I bid you be your brave, strong self. We shall be happy again, David. I feel it! I know it! Some tiny joy-bell has just jingled its message in my head, and you will see how proudly I shall comport myself, even in perils by the heathen, in perils in the sea."

Psychologists should note that Mirabel uttered her valiant prophecy about a quarter past eight o'clock on the morning of the 27th of October; at that hour, as nearly as could be ascertained afterwards, some Oban fishermen found in their nets a beer-bottle tightly corked, and obviously containing a folded scrap of paper. They extracted the cork, drew out the paper carefully, and this is what they read:

"Yacht *Fire-fly* wrecked on north end of Lunga, Treshnish Isles, during the early morning of October 15th. James Farrow killed, apparently by falling spar, but his body has been brought ashore. William Tresidder is missing since some time before midnight on the 14th. The owner, undersigned, is not injured. Send help when weather moderates.—DAVID LINDSAY, R.Y.S."

Then the crew of the coble hastily threw overboard such portion of their nets and marking buoys as they had hauled in, and shipped three pairs of oars, and bent to it with a will to reach Oban at the earliest possible moment. For there was a reward of £200 offered for news of Sir David Lind-

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say and the *Fire-fly*, and these men believed they had caught one of the finest fish that ever swam in the sea. Had they known how much really depended on their efforts, sheer desperation might have cost them some part, if not the whole, of the reward, which was placarded at Oban but not at Tobermorey. Luckily, they were not flurried by fear of being forestalled, so it came to pass that, while the skipper of the *Hawk* and one of his men were indulging in a dram before going to the telegraph office at Tobermorey, the strong-armed fishers, employing just the right amount of energy to drive the coble along on top of a favorable tide, reached the quay at Oban shortly before nine o'clock. Two of them scanned the posters to learn the address of David's sister, and their mates hurried to find the harbor-master. It was a near thing, because the Tobermorey telegram was handed in first, and the Yacht Club officials at Cowes got busy on the telephone trunk-line to London. But Oban won, and a white-faced but very pretty woman, who was being persuaded by her husband to try and eat a breakfast for which she had no appetite, was stirred into tearful yet hungry joy by sight of a slip of pink paper which announced that her brother was alive.

It may also be explained that David had not given his sister's address in the first instance, because he was not certain that she was aware of any mishap having befallen him, nor could he be quite sure of her whereabouts, since her latest news indicated that

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her husband might be summoned any day to Malta, whither she meant to accompany him.

In fact, Captain the Honorable Phillip Beringer had actually induced the Admiralty to withhold his appointment in the Mediterranean for a month while he directed the search then being made in every estuary and on each tiny islet in the vicinity of Scarba, Jura, Colonsay, and Islay, though the story told by Tresidder and the captain of the trawler which struck the *Fire-fly* seemed to determine David's fate beyond question.

But, vital as the issue was to Mrs. Beringer, the race between the coble and the *Hawk*—which, in its way, somewhat resembled the historic contest between the tortoise and the hare—set in motion forces that were little short of Titanic so far as Mirabel and David were concerned.

The thrilling news from Oban, supplemented by a brief newspaper telegram from Tobermorey announcing the presence on Lunga of a young lady who was being sought by her father and her husband, did not escape the vigilant eyes of alert news-editors in London. The Tobermorey scribe mentioned the names of both Locksley and Hawley, for whisky had loosened the tongues of the *Hawk's* crew, and it was recalled that a hue and cry had gone out from Dover for a Mrs. Hawley, who had mysteriously disappeared after alighting from the boat-train while on her wedding-trip to the Continent. For some unknown reason that sensation had rapidly died down;

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now it was revived with zest. Just consider the ingredients of the journalistic *plat*—a rich young baronet, a runaway bride, an uninhabited island, storm, shipwreck, relatives either despairing or furious, and a message from the sea to savor the dish—what more was needed?

Parliament, in autumn session, was dull as ditch-water, the Kaiser had not made a speech for weeks, and Mr. Roosevelt was popularly supposed to be either writing a book or undergoing a Spartan training for the next presidential campaign; so the Fleet-street pack gave tongue, and picked up the trail by telephone, telegraph, and taxicab, with the result that, when Captain Beringer and his wife arrived at King's Cross to catch the 2.20 P.M. train for the North, they recognized among their fellow-passengers five special correspondents who had interviewed them earlier at Clarges-street.

In a word, the press had discovered Lunga, and the fortunes of Mirabel and David were now in the lap of the gods.

Beringer, one of the youngest men of his rank in the Royal Navy, and consequently an exceedingly smart and capable officer, had some glimmering of the truth when he said to his wife:

“Davie has been pulled into the limelight this time, Doris, and no mistake. Of course, I didn't dream of the existence of a girl on Lunga when I spread myself to the reporters this morning on the miraculous thousand-to-one chance he had pulled off

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in escaping from that gale. I gave one of 'em his photograph, too."

"Oh, Phil, you didn't really!" gasped Mrs. Beringer.

"Fact. Did it purposely. Davie ought to realize his responsibilities, and the press will tell him now what an important man he is. Of course, his being mixed up with a young lady who doesn't seem to care much for the husband she won in the lottery rather complicates matters. Not that it affects Davie, so far as I can see. But it's odd, confoundedly odd! Did you twig one Johnny snapshotting us on the platform? We'll all be in the papers tomorrow!"

Mrs. Beringer stood up, and looked into a mirror fixed in the partition above her husband's head.

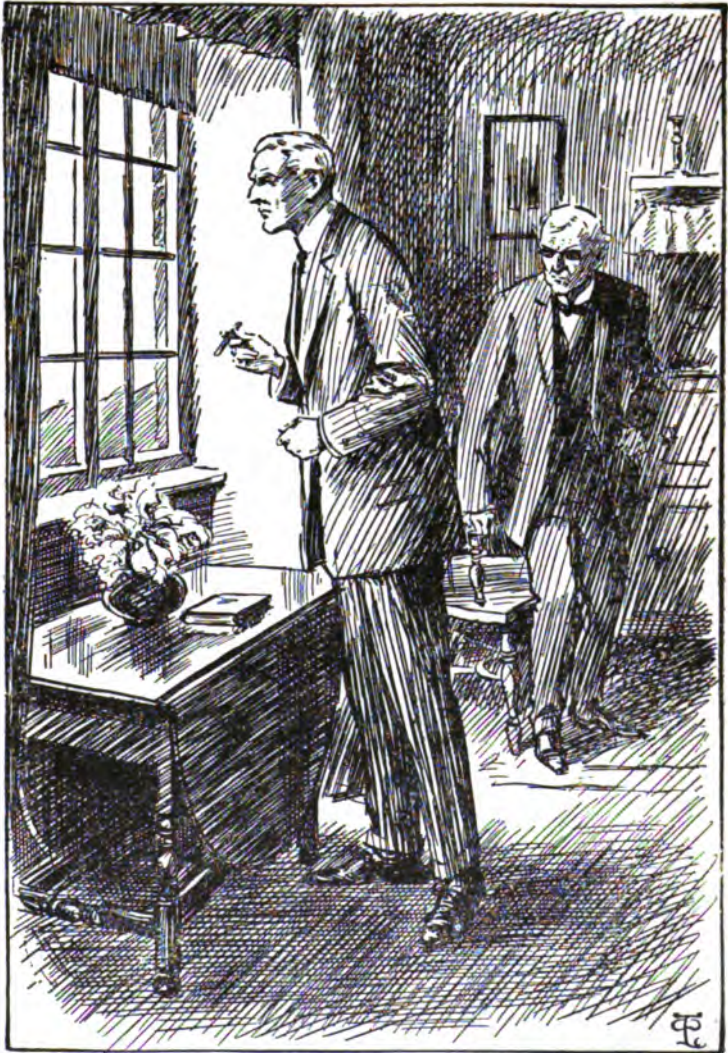
"What is it now?" he asked.

"I just wanted to see if my hat was on straight. I came away in such a hurry."

Meanwhile, the two people who had caused all this commotion had come face to face with the men primarily responsible for it.

Hawley, too impatient and ill at ease to eat, had risen from the table on which Donald had set out a substantial meal before leaving the house. He was standing on the hearthrug before the kitchen fire, and was cutting the end off a cigar, when he saw Mirabel turning in through the gate.

"Here she is!" he cried. "But who the devil is *this*?" he added, after a fixed stare at David.



"HAS SHE A STRANGER WITH HER?" *Page 229*



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Locksley sprang up hurriedly. From where he sat he could not see the path, and, in any event, his failing eyesight was less effective by day than by night, because the glasses he wore were so darkened as to be almost opaque.

"Has she a stranger with her?" he asked, in a voice of terror, which contrasted curiously with the calm demeanor he had displayed since landing on the island.

"Yes. Some fellow I have never seen before."

There was an instant of tense silence. Then Mirabel entered, with David close on her heels. She went to her father and kissed him affectionately.

"I am sorry, dad, if I have caused you any real trouble," she said, placing both hands on his shoulders and gazing at him sorrowfully; "but you yourself sent me away to live with a man whom I detested, and some spirit of rebellion seized me, so I came here."

She ignored Hawley completely, but the man had sufficient self-control not to interfere. He stood stock-still, and looked from Mirabel to David, scowling a little when he heard the girl's uncompromising words, but otherwise exhibiting a restraint that was almost dignified in the circumstances.

"You have behaved foolishly, Mirabel, and given me and your husband much pain and anxiety," said Locksley, whose nervousness seemed to be natural enough, though it arose from fright at David's unexpected presence.

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"I had no other alternative but death," persisted Mirabel. "Rather than endure the man you call my husband, I would have died. I meant it, and I still mean it."

Locksley took hold of her wrists and gently released himself.

"There is no need to discuss our affairs before one who has no concern in them," he said. "Who is this gentleman, and how comes it that he should be found on Lunga, which is private property?"

"This is Sir David Lindsay, whose yacht was wrecked on the island at daybreak on the 15th," said Mirabel, speaking with amazing calmness.

"Twelve days ago!"

"Yes."

"You helped to rescue him and the members of his crew, I suppose?"

"No. He alone was saved, yet I did not help him, but rather left him to fend for himself. I want to be quite candid. I thought that you had sent the yacht to bring me back to the mainland."

"Your daughter is not doing herself justice," interposed David. "She was somewhat afraid of me at first, a thing not to be wondered at, since my earliest task was to bury one of my men, who had been killed by the collision which crippled my boat. But she soon relented. It may clear the air if I say at once, Mr. Locksley, that I am thoroughly aware of the conditions under which Mirabel happens to be here."

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Then Hawley struck in, fiercely and venomously.

"The lady's name is Mrs. Hawley, Sir David Lindsay," he said.

"She has informed me that she does not choose to be known by that name," said David.

"Her wishes in such a matter must be disregarded."

"Not by me."

Their eyes met, and Hawley's face flushed with a rage that threatened a vulgar outburst, but Locksley, who had recovered his strange air of detachment, held up a protesting hand.

"There is no need to augment our troubles by bickering about names," he said. "You, Sir David, on the mere presumption of your title, are a gentleman, and I look to you for assistance in a matter of no small difficulty. I take it that my daughter has shown you some hospitality during your stay on the island, and, as its tenant, I wish to associate myself with her action, but it must be obvious to you, as a man of the world, that the present unfortunate dispute is one in which you cannot take sides."

"It is too late to discuss platitudes, Mr. Locksley," said David. "Mirabel and I have passed that stage long since. I recognize that a certain legal tie was forced upon her by some outrageous misrepresentation whose exact nature I mean to ascertain. Pray let me speak plainly"—for he fancied that behind the black shades which hid the older man's

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eyes there was a gleam of anger, and certainly the thin, mobile lips had twitched in manifest annoyance—"I do not mean to associate you with positive double-dealing, but I do assert my solemn conviction that her consent to a marriage which she loathed was wrung from her by means that will not bear the scrutiny of honest men, and it is for you to show that you deserve my sympathy rather than claim it on grounds the fairness of which I refuse to admit."

"Of course, I deny entirely your right to take up this extraordinary attitude," said Locksley.

"Ah, but you cannot, dad!" broke in Mirabel.

"Do be quiet, my girl. Sir David Lindsay must know that he is uttering a gross slander, and it may surprise him if he hears the views of a judge thereon."

Mirabel gave David one swift look, and then faced her father again.

"A judge!" she cried, and her voice thrilled with emotion. "I have never seen a judge, but I picture him as one wise, and just, and compassionate. Let me meet your judge, and I shall test his wisdom by asking if a woman should be compelled to marry a man whom she detests. If he be just, he shall say whether she should become the means of barter between her father and an intruder who holds him bound by some wretched threat. And, if he is compassionate, will he not bestow her on the man she loves, for whom her soul sang during the silent years,

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and with whom she would rather live a day in happiness than pass a century in despair with the husband of your choice?"

Locksley, on whom her vehement declaration seemed to have an unnerving effect, for his pale features had grown sallow, and drops of moisture glistened on his forehead, stretched forth his hands in piteous appeal. His partial blindness was more potent than mere words. It needed a less impetuous heart than Mirabel's to withstand his pathetic aspect.

"Mirabel, my child, what evil spirit possesses you that you should speak to me in that way?" he said, and his lips quivered.

She ran to him swiftly, and took him in her arms.

"Dad, my own dear dad, do we not know the evil spirit who persuaded both of us to do wrong?" she exclaimed. "Don't turn away from me, but listen, for love has clarified my understanding and given me the gift of tongues. Let us have done with pretense! I love David, and I know he loves me, though he tried to crush the knowledge out of his heart when he heard that I was married to another man. David is all that a true and gallant gentleman should be; if it is fated that we should part, he will go now, and never see either of us again, though I am his and he mine till the earth receives us in a last embrace. Let that man who has ruined our lives make some amends by imitating the example David will set him. You and I may find con-

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solation and forgetfulness in that peaceful world from which you were too ready to drive me. I do not ask for much, when my poor heart is like to break at the thought of losing its mate forever, but I shall never acknowledge any other man as my husband; never, never, do or say what you will."

He appeared to be unable to resist the tender tumult of her pleading. Hiding his face in his hands, he sank into a chair and bent his gray head over the table.

"Oh, ho!" sneered Hawley, glaring from Mirabel to David. "Is that the precious scheme you have concocted? Get rid of me, eh? I walk out, and you walk out, and when I go over the hill you walk in again. Say, Locksley, pull yourself together. It's high time we quit fooling. Send that long Highlander across to Mull in his boat, and get the *Hawk* back here before night."

"Oh, ho!" croaked a voice, which came from behind Hawley's boots, and caused him to turn quickly with a look of scare in his eyes.

The jackdaw had passed a disturbed night, and was snoozing inside the fender till aroused by his favorite exclamation.

CHAPTER XIII

HAWLEY'S TERMS

"OH, it's you, gollywog, is it?" cried Hawley.

His lean, insipidly fair face had shown such needless alarm at hearing a strange voice that David found himself wondering if the man's nervous system was out of order. Evidently conscious that he was exhibiting a too pronounced relief, Hawley regarded the bird with a wry smile.

"Guess you have more common sense in that perky black head of yours than the whole bunch of us put together, Jack," he said.

No one spoke. Locksley, by habit a taciturn man, seemed to have collapsed, and his head sank still deeper into his folded arms, while Mirabel was bent over him, with a solicitous hand resting on his shoulders. Lindsay, who was trying as he had never tried before to read character in a man's face, encountered his rival's furtive, half-sullen, half-jesting glance, and Hawley affected to treat the jackdaw's interruption as an excuse for adopting a lighter tone.

"Now, look here, Mirabel," he said, strutting confidently again on the hearthrug—"and you, Locksley, and you, too, Sir David Lindsay—if that

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is the proper way to address you—suppose we all come off the high-tragedy perch for a while. I've stood here quite a time, and heard myself called a lot of hard names—not straight out, of course, but it was plain enough for anyone to see that they were meant for me. Now, I've done nothing that I am ashamed of. It isn't exactly a crime that I should want to marry a pretty girl like you, Mirabel, or, having married you, that I should wish my wife to be my wife. But you've got some bee in your bonnet which prevents you from accepting the views of the every-day sort of woman who goes through the marriage ceremony. Well, I'm not an unreasonable person. If you had chosen to take me into your confidence at first, there would have been no call for the excitement and worry of the last three weeks. You frightened yourself into a panic, gave me no end of a scare when I found you were not on board the steamer, and generally raised Cain all round, whereas a few friendly words between you and me would have settled the whole affair. But don't let us cry over spilt milk. I make you a straight offer. Let us three go back to Ealing, and live there quietly for a month or two. By the New Year, or sooner, we may come to look at matters in a different light. Now, Sir David Lindsay, you don't strike me as the sort of man who would encourage any nonsense, and, as you have been dragged into a family dispute, I put it to you—is my proposition a reasonable one, or is it not?"

HAWLEY'S TERMS

He delivered himself with a certain breeziness of manner which commanded attention. Despite an obvious effort to speak with moderation, he undoubtedly did not leave out of reckoning some of the graver difficulties suggested by Mirabel's unyielding attitude. Even the girl herself raised her eyes and looked at him when he suggested an immediate return to her father's house at Ealing.

But David, outwardly self-contained and watchful, was torn by renewed conflict between expediency and desire. He felt like a man imprisoned in a fortress from which escape was impossible save by the door of dishonor. And the burthen of decision rested on him. In that passionate hour Mirabel was incapable of the cool and ordered judgment on which her future depended. If he took the wrong path now, he might wreck her life and his own, and, bitter and humiliating as the confession might be, the truculent, self-confident adventurer now awaiting his answer had pointed out the only road that offered at once a compromise, and, for Mirabel, salvation.

The sunlit room grew dim in his sight, and Mirabel's graceful form, still stooping over her disconsolate father, seemed to recede from him into immeasurable gloom, but a truth that was not to be denied was hammering at heart and brain, and he said dully:

"I agree with you, Mr. Hawley. Some of us are the victims of fate, but a situation that is intolerable in many respects cannot be ended here. Yes, you

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must leave the island. Your advice is good. I—I only entreat you to be considerate.”

He could not force his tongue to utter another syllable. His voice had a strange sound in his ears, as though he was contending against the roar of a cataract. He dared not endeavor to clear the gathering mist from his eyes and look at Mirabel, for he feared lest he should falter in his purpose and stammer some heartbroken excuse for this seeming disloyalty. That was the hardest part of the sacrifice—that she should believe he had forsaken her. For one frenzied instant he was tempted to retract his words, and tell the woman he loved that he was hers to command, her slave to do with as she willed. Perhaps it was Mirabel who saved him—he never knew—but he heard her saying, with bewildering calmness:

“Thank you, David. You, at least, ring true where all else is false. Now, will you please leave me with my father? Mr. Hawley, I think we shall accept your conditions, but my father and I must first understand each other clearly.”

She straightened herself proudly, and a wistful smile hovered on her lips as she watched David pass out in silence through the porch. Hawley showed a momentary hesitation about following him. Obviously, he was opposed to any private settlement between father and daughter to which he was not a party. But Mirabel smiled, even at him.

“You have striven to behave rather well,” she

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said. "I am sure you will not lessen the good opinion I have formed of you so recently by refusing my request."

It needed a somewhat brazen character to extract much encouragement from that qualified praise, but Mirabel had not spoken so graciously to the man since the project of marriage was first mooted.

"Sorry," he said apologetically. "I didn't quite realize that you meant me to make myself scarce. Shall I send Macdonald to Tobermorey?"

"Not yet. I shall come to you in a little while."

Jamming on his hat, which was lying on the table in front of the window, he went out with a haste that was rather exaggerated. In every tone and action he was devoid of good breeding, and even the minor amenities of life sat on him like ill-fitting garments. Having carried matters with a high hand since his whirlwind return to Locksley's house in London, he fancied now that he had behaved with extraordinary tact and forbearance. He took to himself all the credit of a settlement which he deemed highly satisfactory, and, when he paused at the gate to light the cigar which he still held in his hand, he nodded affably to Macdonald, who was sitting on the low wall of the garden and gazing contemplatively at the sea.

"Which way did Sir David go?" he inquired, for Lindsay had vanished.

"I didna ask him," said the fisherman.

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"I don't suppose you did, but you have eyes to see with."

"Ou, aye."

"Well, he must have passed you a moment ago?"

"Aye."

"Where is he, then?"

"I dinna ken."

Hawley laughed, quite good-humoredly, though his mirth, at the best, had a snarl in it.

"If I'm up against the clan, it's a thousand dollars to a hayseed I'm down and out," he said, and strode off by the westerly path, which was, in fact, the only semblance of a beaten track that Lunga possessed.

Donald looked after him.

"If ye were up against a big tree wi' a rope around yer neck, ye'd be in the recht place, ma bonnie man," he muttered, and spat viciously.

Hawley, being no stranger at Argos, knew that a short climb would bring him to a point on Cruachan whence he could overlook nearly the whole length of the island. Indeed, if he had not stopped to question Macdonald, with such poor result, he would have seen David mounting the hill, which rose so steeply from the house that anyone taking that route disappeared almost immediately among the rocks, owing to the sharp curve in the path.

David had gone that way mechanically. His bruised spirit found some physical solace in rapid

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movement, and he was abreast of the Harp Rock when he realized that he was making for the Corran. The dog had rushed out after him, and was now nosing about among the tufts of grass for those rabbits which he chased with such unrewarded perseverance.

Then, through the storm of useless regrets raging in his breast, the thought intruded that he might be wanted by Mirabel. He must remain within hail, throw himself down on some rock whence Donald could summon him. With a word to Carlo, he turned on his heel, and had not retraced his steps many yards when Hawley appeared.

His gorge rose at sight of the man, whose jaunty and truculent bearing served to emphasize the hopelessness of Mirabel's unhappy dilemma. Had her father scoured the world, he could hardly have chosen anyone more unsuited to become the husband of such a girl than this crude, hectoring fellow, whose smug complacency had nevertheless provided the only means of escape from a position that bristled with perils. Not that Hawley was repulsive in appearance, or wholly ill-mannered—that was the hideous crux of the problem. He was only a year or two older than David himself, nearly as tall, and might be considered by many women as better looking, for he carried himself with a confident air and would have an eye for every pretty girl he met, whereas David had unconsciously waited throughout all his wander-years to meet Mirabel.

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And David knew, as every man worth his salt knows, that a pure-minded, sensitive, and highly intellectual woman should not be yoked for life with a mate who would fail to appreciate these qualities of the soul rather than of the body. It was evident, from the outset, that Mirabel had divined in Hawley's personality the antithesis to her every thought and aspiration. She had shuddered at the nightmare notion of marrying him; she avoided him as something repellent and unendurable, while yet her impulsive heart had never throbbed with passion. If she shrank from him then, how exquisite must be her torture now! Nevertheless, how futile were these pangs of longing and despair! Some gleam of the volcano burning in David must have shot from his eyes when Hawley addressed him, for the man drew back and his rather curiously bleached, though highly colored face, whitened.

David, glowering and aflame, was aware that the other had spoken, but the words fell on inattentive ears. They served, however, to dispel the cloud that had gathered on his senses, and he stayed.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I heard you, but did not heed. My mind was elsewhere."

"I don't doubt you, Sir David. This business has upset all of us," replied Hawley, who believed he had hit on what he called "the right line," and meant to follow it. "I only said that I would like to have a word or two with you. It seems to me that, if two men of intelligence tackle a difficulty, they can

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settle it in a reasonable way, which is a thing one can't expect from a woman."

"I am not aware of any dispute," said David.

"Oh, come now," and Hawley cocked his head on one side with a knowing leer that was accentuated by the tilt of a Homburg hat, "isn't that a bit steep? When all is said and done, it is barely ten minutes since my wife was vowing by all the gods that she hated me and loved you."

"Well?"

"Have you nothing to say about it?"

"No."

"But I have. Do you think it was playing ball, or playing cricket, as you say in this country, to take advantage of——"

"I have no desire to lay violent hands on you, but I shall certainly knock you down if you utter one syllable derogatory of the lady you are discussing," said David.

Hawley might be a rascal, but he was not a coward. He had flinched from the unconscious fury of David's first glance, but he did not show the white feather now. Moreover, he felt he had the whip-hand in the present situation, and meant to keep it.

"You ought to have waited till I finished," he said quietly. "It isn't likely I want to defame my wife. I guess I've known her longer than you, and I don't need your help to protect her. And again I ask if you think it was quite fair to encourage her highfalutin' notions after you knew she was married?"

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Some worm of dread and doubt gnawed at David's vitals, but he only said:

"I offer no excuse for anything I have done."

"Hum! That may be taken either way. She never told you about the marriage, I suppose, until her father and I turned up?"

"She has made no secret of her attitude."

"Still, the fact remains that she is my wife, and, before this rotten tangle gets more mixed, I am anxious to straighten it out a bit, if I can. I'm not holding you responsible—understand that, now, and all the time. By the way, is your yacht ashore or gone to the bottom?"

David believed that the man was endeavoring to throw him off his guard by these constant allusions to the marriage and to Mirabel as his wife. He was prepared, too, for the sequel to the sudden question with regard to the present condition of the *Fire-fly*, and he determined to use his wits in defense of Mirabel, if not of himself.

"My cutter is ashore on the north end of the island," he said. "She is quite habitable, and the lady you describe as your wife, but who repudiates the contract on the ground that it was obtained by fraud, slept on board last night. If you walk to the Corran, you will see the cutter."

Still Hawley refused to get angry, which was all the more remarkable after the ill-temper he had displayed earlier.

"I take your word for it, of course," he said coolly.

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“And, for the moment, I leave the matter of the marriage, which concerns her, and me, and her father, and no one else, Sir David Lindsay. What I want to say now is this: Some time soon—this evening, I expect—we shall all cross to the mainland. There is sure to be a lot of talk and gossip when we land. For one thing, it was known to those men on the *Hawk*, who scooted without orders, damn them, for some reason or another——”

“They are not to blame. I sent the *Hawk* back to Tobermorey,” broke in David.

“Did you, now? That was mighty smart of you. But may I ask why?”

“I was resolved to protect—resolved to prevent any drastic measures being adopted until everyone concerned had had a fitting opportunity for the discussion which took place this morning.”

“Well, I’m not kicking because I was bested there. Anyhow, those fellows knew that Locksley and I were coming here to fetch Mirabel. There will be a hooroosh of sorts in the press, too, when the news of your escape leaks out. I guess you aren’t aware that you’ve been written up as dead?”

“No,” said David, who was interested in this statement despite his misery, for he realized now that his sister and other relatives must have undergone agonies of apprehension in his behalf.

“It’s a fact, nevertheless,” said Hawley. “It occurred to me a while ago that I read about your yacht—the *Fire-fly*, isn’t it—being sunk in collision

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after leaving Oban just before that big gale in the middle of the month. You can see for yourself what a brass-band and fireworks picnic this is for the newspapers. Can't it be stopped?"

"How?"

"You must shut down on the fact that Mirabel and you were alone on the island. Drag in Macdonald. He'll lie like a politician to serve both of you. As for the dust-up in the Locksley family, leave it to me. That is my game, and I'll play it single-handed."

"You may be sure that no cause for scandal will arise from anything said by me. I imagine, too, that you are exaggerating the risk of undue publicity. But it is only fair to tell you that I shall use every means within my power to get your marriage annulled."

"That's baby-talk, Sir David, and you know it."

"In forcing yourself on Mr. Locksley and his daughter you had some motive other than the honest wish of a man to secure the woman he loves. What was it? Money? If so, I am given to understand that Locksley is not wealthy. I am."

Hawley smiled. He rolled the cigar between his lips and puffed out a cloud of smoke.

"No, sir," he said. "Nothing doing."

"I merely wished to discover how you would take the suggestion of bribery. It is not new to you, I see."

Hawley's eyes narrowed a little, but he curbed

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his tongue, which had run somewhat beyond his intent.

"This rock we are standing on has been here a few thousand years," he said, "but it will sink out of sight in the sea before I budge one inch from my legal rights. And that's a fact, and the sooner you realize it the better it will be for all of us."

"Then, for the present, there is nothing more to be said."

David walked on. The pall of despair which enwrapped his spirit had lifted for an instant. He had learnt something, not much, but enough to set his wits at work. This interloper might honestly admire Mirabel, but admiration weighed light as thistledown in the balance against some hidden but all-powerful lure. Why was Hawley so anxious to avoid notoriety? For all his bluster and bounce, he was eager now as Locksley had ever been to keep Mirabel from public ken. There was some tremendous issue at stake, and it centered constantly on the one mainspring of effort—Mirabel must not be seen or known—Mirabel must never even have the gratification of seeing her own sweet face smiling from a photograph. And with that David remembered the films in his pocket!

Hawley was sauntering close behind, so David waited but a moment to tell Donald that he would be on the other side of the Dorlin if wanted. He was crossing the tiny plateau in front of the house when Mirabel called him.

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He turned and saw her standing in the porch. The autumn sun, now high in the southeast, streamed full on her sad face, and made a glory of her luxuriant hair. For an instant she reminded him of some beautiful saint painted by one of those inspired artists of the Renaissance who struggled to depict living and pulsing femininity in the traditional guise of the devotee. The notion was startling, almost unnerving. During that momentous parley between father and daughter had some secret been revealed which reconciled Mirabel to a life of self-sacrifice? He feared that this must be so, for her voice was subdued, and her eyes dwelt on the distant line of sea and sky with the far-away look of one resigned to the inevitable.

"David," she said, "will you arrange with Donald to have the steamer brought here as speedily as may be?"

"I shall go with him," he answered, and a dreadful premonition gripped him that he might never again see Mirabel framed in the doorway of Argos. But Hawley was within earshot, and he compelled himself to continue in a commonplace tone.

"There is no wind, and it will be a stiff pull against the tide."

"What tide? The coble's neaped," growled Donald, who had not budged from the wall.

Then, the small things of life being ever more potent than the great, David and Mirabel gazed at each other blankly. They had forgotten the tide.

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It would be high-water about four o'clock, and the heavy boat could not find seaway in the channels among the reefs until long after midday.

"Does that mean that we are cooped up in this hole till the Lord-knows-when o'clock to-night?" broke in Hawley, for he resented Mirabel's recognition of David alone, and he wished to remind both of them that the really important person was present in himself.

Donald's lips set in a line, but David felt that there was no use in postponing the evil hour.

"We can make Treshnish by six, Donald," he said, "and a sailing breeze may spring up before sunset."

"Like enough, sir, but ye'll be forgettin' that it's the Sabbath the morn, an' every mother's son aboard the *Hawk* will be fu' the necht. Ye'll no hae yon wee steamer here afore Monday's A.M. tide."

"Then we'll all go in the coble," said Hawley. "It'll hold us, I guess."

"No," said a placid voice from the gloom of the porch. "Donald is quite right. The crew of the *Hawk* will not be available before Monday, and, in the meantime, Mirabel and I can pack a good many articles which were left here on account of our hurried departure in September. There is no urgency, I take it, unless Sir David Lindsay is anxious to be gone?"

Mirabel had moved to one side when she heard her father speaking. He did not come out into the open,

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probably because he disliked the strong sunlight, but his precise, measured accents reached the others clearly. The fisherman glanced covertly at David. The others knew his title, then? He wondered how, and when, they had learned it!

For a wonder, Hawley did not interfere—perhaps he felt the purpose underlying Locksley's tranquil words,—and David felt that he was expected to answer.

“I fancied you would leave Lunga to-night,” he said, “and I had it in my mind to remain here a day or two and patch up my yacht sufficiently to launch her. Then she can be towed, or carried if necessary, to Oban or elsewhere.”

He reverted to his earlier decision on the spur of the moment. He simply could not bring himself to leave Mirabel yet.

Thus did Fate ply her shuttle in weaving the web of destiny for those four people. It seemed to be a comparatively trivial matter whether they sailed from the island that evening or on Monday morning, yet it was as important for some of them as that the morrow's sun should rise.

David, under compulsion to make good his project with regard to the *Fire-fly*, asked Mirabel if she could spare Donald for a few hours.

“Yes,” she said. “You will come here for luncheon, of course?”

“I think not, if you will excuse me. I shall need all the hours of daylight.”

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"Very well," she said, with really admirable non-chalance. "I shall bring you something to eat about one o'clock."

"Can't I help? I am on a loose end for the day," put in Hawley.

Quite unexpectedly, David took him at his word, and he fancied that Mirabel gave him a quick underlook of thanks as she went inside the house again.

So the oddly assorted trio of laborers went off to the cutter, shored her up as best they could on stones and barks gathered from the wreckage that strewed the beach, and set to work with hammer and nails, and strips torn from an oilskin coat, with here and there a batten of wood or stout crosspiece, to render the tiny vessel seaworthy enough to float in a smooth sea.

When they met at dinner, Locksley struck in boldly on the lines of ordinary conversation and grew interested when he found that David could speak the *taal*, and had some smattering of the Kaffir language.

He confessed that philology was his favorite study, and regretted the loss of his eyesight—though, oddly enough, he could still read a little by artificial light. Once he grew reminiscent.

"When I was a young man, long before Mirabel was born," he said sadly, "I began gathering material for a book on the aboriginal words and ideas preserved among the negroes of North America. In many instances, three generations alone—in some

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few, only two—separated men and women working on the plantations of Georgia from the slaves brought from West Africa. It was a field full of promise, but”—and he waved a thin hand, white and well-kept—“*O mihi præteritos referat si Jupiter annos!*”¹

“I came across a remarkably fine Elzevir in your library,” said David. “Evidently, Virgil is your favorite poet among the Latins.”

There was a curious pause. Locksley had lifted a glass of wine to his lips, but he spilled a little, and he replaced the glass on the table. He wore such exceedingly dark spectacles, with side facets and close-fitting screens, that it was almost impossible to detect any change of expression, but his voice was well under control when he spoke.

“Are you a collector of rare books, then?” he asked.

“Hardly that. A few reached my hands by inheritance, but the man must be dense indeed who could examine your Virgil and not admire it.”

“It should not have been left here, of course, but I am glad of the chance if it gave you pleasure. Perhaps you discovered also that my daughter has a fair knowledge of the classics for one of her years?”

“She often left me dumb, Mr. Locksley. If I

¹ “Oh, if Jove would but give me back the years that have gone!”

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have not so many vanished years to regret, I plead guilty to a good many wasted hours."

Hawley, sitting quiet as a mouse, suddenly broke in on their talk.

"Give me a real live newspaper before a Virgil any day," he said.

Now David was certain that this sentiment was not one to which Locksley would subscribe, and he caught a scornful uplifting of Mirabel's eyebrows. But Hawley's philosophy of the pavement passed unchallenged, and David marveled more than ever at the strange hap which introduced the man into such a household as a son-in-law.

When the meal was ended, Locksley pressed David hospitably to retain the room he understood he had occupied while on Lunga, saying that he himself could sleep in the sitting-room; but David declined, and bade the company "Good-night" generally.

To his surprise, Mirabel overtook him at the gate.

"David," she said, without any dropping of her voice, which could certainly be heard by anyone in the house who chose to listen, "I want to tell you that you behaved nobly to-day. We have had our hour of dreaming, and have awaked to a dreary world, but I shall never forget how you helped me when I was tempted to fling to the winds all claims of duty. Don't be unhappy, David! There are other years than those which have sped, and you, dear, deserve that they should be joyous ones."

She flitted back to the house, as though she were

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unwilling to create further rancor in any breast by seeming to exchange confidences with him. His heart was full, but a subtle sense of peace and trust had emanated from Mirabel like that scent of violets which was ever with her, and when his eyes turned to the drowsy sea he remembered Browning's lines:

“ Oh moment, one and infinite!
The water slips o'er stock and stone;
The west is tender, hardly bright.
How gray at once the evening grown—
One star, the chrysolite!”

Never, even in Scotland, did British Sabbath pass more slowly than the next day. Towards evening, Donald set off for Mull, bearing with him a telegram to be dispatched early next morning to a shipping firm at Oban, asking them to send a tug for the *Fire-fly*.

Soon after daybreak on Monday, the three people in *Argos* made preparations for prompt departure, and Mirabel herself summoned David to breakfast.

Beyond giving each other an address for letters, they said little while walking to the house together for the last time. Mirabel did not volunteer any statement as to the conversation with her father. She appeared to look on the arrangements for the immediate future as irrevocable, and David did not refer again to the investigations into Hawley's past which he was resolved to make.

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The four were seated at breakfast when three loud blasts on a siren awoke the echoes of Lunga.

Hawley alone was not startled.

"The *Hawk* must have got steam up good and early," he said.

"But that is not the *Hawk!*" cried Mirabel.

"No," said David, "that signal comes from a large steamer."

They rose hurriedly, all except Locksley, whose impassive face apparently betrayed no emotion. And then, in one of those glimpses into the recesses of a man's mind which are occasionally vouchsafed to another, David read some part of Locksley's secret.

He was waiting, listening, ever waiting for some dreaded thing to happen, ever listening for a foot-fall that would bring ruin and torment everlasting.

For what was he waiting? For whom did he listen? David could not guess. He never would have guessed during all the years of his life had not those vibrant trumpet-notes pealed their tocsin throughout the island that morning.

CHAPTER XIV

SHOWING HOW DAVID RAN THE GAUNTLET

ANCIENT Argos, despite its fame, was not more cunningly built as a retreat than its modern namesake on Lunga. Though the house could not be seen from the sea,—excepting, perhaps, the top of a stone chimney, hard to discern against the background of cliff,—its inhabitants had only to cover a few yards on either hand in order to sweep the horizon. One could lie among the bowlders at each end of the Dorlin and watch the half-circle from north to south, while a minute's climb up the western face of Cruachan revealed the landing-place at the Corran and all the northern islands of the Treshnish group.

But David and Mirabel, having no lurking motive for concealment, raced up the steep slope of the horseshoe's easterly horn, and from the summit instantly made out a paddle-wheel steamer lying in a slight haze about half a mile beyond the Red Reef. The tide was an hour or more after flood, and was beginning to race so strongly to the south that a rowing boat, already lowered from the ship and plying six oars, had to keep its head well up in order

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to maintain the semblance of a line toward the island. But the rowers bent to their task, and the craft drew near rapidly.

"That is one of David MacBrayne's steamers," declared Mirabel, when they had watched the oncoming boat in silence for a while.

"She has been sent for me," said David. "Macdonald's telegram cannot have reached Oban yet, but the *Hawk* must have dispatched my message to Cowes, and my sister has stirred someone in Oban to come to the rescue."

"I believe it is the *Clansman*. If so, how strange!"

"Why strange?"

"Because when first we came to Lunga the *Clansman* brought us, and stopped just where that vessel lies now, and one of her boats landed us and our stores. We lived all that summer in a tent. . . . David, what is your sister's name?"

"Doris—Mrs. Philip Beringer. Good gracious! Mirabel, have I never told you?"

"No. What did we talk about during those long days and pleasant evenings?"

Her voice faltered ever so slightly, but she turned on hearing footsteps on the loose shale, and thus avoided David's glance; apparently, Mr. Locksley had detained Hawley when he was hurrying out to ascertain the reason of the steamer's insistent summons. Owing to Locksley's partial blindness, the two had taken a more circuitous and less difficult path.

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They seemed to be arguing now with some vehemence, and Locksley's clear tones reached them:

"The final decision rests with me. . . . I insist! . . . Time is the real wonder-worker in such matters."

Hawley muttered something, of which the only audible words were: "a dangerous game . . . trying me rather high."

Some one seated in the stern-sheets of the boat stood up and waved a hand.

"That is a woman!" cried Mirabel. "I can see her furs and hat."

"Then it is unquestionably Doris. Of course, she can distinguish us easily. We are facing the sun and standing well above the mist."

For an instant Mirabel forgot her troubles and laughed.

"Having seen me, Mrs. Beringer will be thinking furiously," she tittered. Then her face clouded again. "You must go this time, David. Not even the salving of the *Fire-fly* will serve now as an excuse."

"But why should not all of us journey to Oban on the same steamer? The *Hawk* will be here before we get away, and can be paid and sent back. Oban is practically a day nearer London than Tobermorey."

"I don't think dad will agree to that. . . . There, the lady is waving to you again. . . . And the vessel is the *Clansman*. I can read the name on

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the bows of the boat. David, I thought you had splendid sight."

"I have not been looking at the boat," he murmured, for now the two men were approaching. Mirabel knew well what he meant. He was devouring her with eyes which bore an eloquent message; lest her fortitude should yield, she turned her head again and addressed her father:

"Shall we go to Oban on the *Clansman*, Dad? David, Sir David, says it can be arranged easily."

"No. It will not suit our plans. Are there many people on board that boat?"

So the self-contained Locksley was beginning to gird at the chain which bound him. At no time, even during the stress of that first meeting on the Saturday morning, had his tone to Mirabel been so curt.

But the girl's perceptions seemed to be deadened, and such arrows fell blunted.

"I have counted eight," she said. "A lady and gentleman, two ship's officers, and four sailors."

"A lady!"

David fancied that the man was straining his feeble vision through the almost impenetrable screen of his glasses.

"Yes, Sir David believes it is his sister, Mrs. Philip Beringer."

"But she is not coming here?" and he emphasized the concluding word as if Lunga were a leper-colony.

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"It certainly looks like it," broke in David, heart-sick with the knowledge which he dared not put in words—that Locksley was exacting from his daughter a submissiveness that went beyond reason.

"I refuse to allow any stranger to land on Lunga. My tenancy at least secures me that privilege."

Locksley was far more excited than David had yet seen him. The suave, courteous host of the past two days had become a shrill-voiced, nervous man. For Mirabel's sake, David repressed the retort ready on his lips.

"I am sure that my sister, and her husband, whom I see sitting by her side, will not wish to remain on the island a moment longer than is necessary," he said, moving a little nearer the edge of the cliff, and signaling to the occupants of the boat that they must make for the Corran, since the Carrick Fadha was available as a landing-place only at dead low-water. It was a relief to apply his thoughts to this detail of the moment. Maintain pretense any longer he could not; if Locksley had continued in the same vein, David would have blazed into uncontrollable wrath.

"Here's another steamer!" cried Hawley suddenly.

Then it was seen that a second vessel, an ordinary tug, had crept up unobserved in the mist and was halting somewhat to the southward of the *Clansman*.

"They are lowering a boat, too," said Mirabel, who had put a hand on her father's shoulder, evi-

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dently meaning to warn him against saying that which he might regret later.

"Mirabel," he pleaded, with an agonized gesture which ill-agreed with such simple circumstances, "go to the house and bring the telescope. I must know who all these people are, and what they want."

She went instantly, and David said nothing to the others of his theory that the tug had arrived owing to the instructions forwarded by Macdonald, though he still imagined that barely sufficient time had elapsed since receipt of the message to allow for six hours' fast steaming from Oban.

The three men did not exchange a word until Mirabel returned. Adjusting the telescope with sailor-like deftness, she soon determined that the tug was the *Cormorant*. A number of men had crowded into her boat. They were not sailors. They wore long overcoats and traveling-caps. After a pause came the significant information:

"I am not quite sure, but I think each of them is carrying a camera."

"Journalists!" said Hawley, and he, too, spoke in the hushed tone of fear which was so marked in Locksley's manner.

A piping whistle came through the haze from the northeast, and the *Hawk* appeared, still a couple of miles away, and steaming energetically. Most certainly Lunga figured on the map that morning. David knew that Mirabel had a close acquaintance with Holy Writ. He wondered if she was silently

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applying the verse in Matthew, "Where the carcase is, there will the eagles be."

By this time the *Clansman's* gig was within hailing-distance. One of the two men whom Mirabel had taken for ship's officers was Tresidder. David was about to point him out to Mirabel when Captain Beringer stood up, and the cry came distinctly:

"Davie, ahoy!"

"Ahoy, Phil! Bear away north! I'll pilot you."

"Right-o!"

Doris waved her handkerchief, and forthwith focused a pair of field-glasses, not at her brother. After a steady scrutiny, she dropped the glasses and spoke to her husband. David smiled. He wondered what she had said about Mirabel.

"Won't you come to the Corran and meet them?" he said, looking at Mirabel, who had remained close to her father. He was sure that Locksley muttered something, and he saw the look of pain that flitted across the girl's eyes.

"No," she said. "Better say 'Good-by' now, David."

"Oh, but this is the very depth of folly," he protested, roused instantly to white heat by the thought of parting from her without another word of farewell. "What possible reason can there be why you should not meet my sister? . . . Mr. Locksley, you are taxing my patience too highly. If you and your accomplice——"



"YOU ARE TAKING MY PATIENCE TOO HIGHLY." Page 262.



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He pulled up short, but the word was out. Locksley flinched, as though from an unexpected blow, and Hawley's white eyes rolled, but the man seemed to have become amazingly subdued; he did not interfere: his attitude was watchful but restrained. It was easy to fancy him saying to himself, "This is their quarrel—let them fight it out!"

"I am sorry I expressed myself so harshly," went on David, though there was more of accusation than contriteness in his voice. "I apologize, and can only urge that your own actions are largely accountable for an unfortunate slip on my part. Still, I cannot withdraw my request. What am I to say to my relatives? How shall I explain your unwarranted suspicions? Unless you allow Mirabel to accompany me to the Corran, nothing that you can say or do shall prevent me from bringing my sister and brother-in-law to your house."

The boat was forging ahead, and it was obvious that her occupants would soon be speculating as to the queer motives which kept the little group on Lunga apparently rooted to the one spot. No one answered David, and the silence grew irksome. His face flushed with an anger that threatened to become quite ungovernable; burning, scathing words from heart and brain were jostling each other in a mad tumult and struggle for expression when Locksley, seemingly aware of the imminent outburst, said in hushed, broken accents:

"If you will keep pace with the boat for a few

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minutes, Sir David Lindsay, my daughter shall overtake you."

David turned on his heel. He refused to thank the man for this tardy concession, for his mind was in a turmoil of helpless fury. Yet in years to come he remembered his last glimpse of that slight, erect figure, pathetically gazing out over the ocean which he could see but dimly, with Mirabel standing by his side, and the strangely blond, almost white-haired Hawley strutting somewhat apart, oddly indifferent to the tension felt by his companions and, to all appearance, far more interested in the advent of the second boat than in the battle of strong wills and stubborn purposes which had come to such an abrupt conclusion.

Even in that chaotic instant, when his thoughts would not bear putting into ordered sequence, David had a subconscious sense of the hidden tragedy in the incongruous picture. When he knew the truth, he pitied and forgave, but neither pity nor forgiveness found room in his heart while he walked slowly along the cliff in line with the laboring boat. He wanted to curse those two men with his mouth and rend them with his hands. By some impalpable means they had torn Mirabel from him. And he could have beaten them at their own wretched intriguing! He knew that beyond all question. On that night of all nights, when Mirabel was passive and weeping in his arms, one passionate word would have brought her with him in Macdonald's coble to

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the mainland. Ah, God! would it have been an evil thing to have snatched her from the gray misery that now encompassed her? In his wrath and grief and plaint against destiny, he flung his right arm heavenward; his sister saw the gesture, and, interpreting it in the only possible way, waved a handkerchief to him, while Beringer shouted a cheery view-halloo.

The incident helped to restore his disordered senses. He was passing the well, walking very slowly, because the tide was running like a millrace, and was striving to beat down the storm which had so suddenly overpowered him, when a slight and regular series of rustlings in the grass of the glen leading up the side of Cruachan caught his ear. It was the jackdaw, taking a shortcut.

"Ho, ho, off we go!" said the bird, springing to the top of a rock.

"Correct as usual, Jack," said David, with whom the feathered humorist had long been on friendly terms.

"Mirabel, Carlo," said the bird.

"History still repeats itself," said David.

But the jackdaw varied his repertoire. He scratched his head with a scaly claw, and muttered:

"All right! Good dog! All right!"

"No, it's all wrong," said David.

The bird saw some tiny insect moving in the grass, and leaped after it. David gave his atten-

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tion to the boat for a moment, waving to the helmsman to come a little closer to the cliff, and thus avoid the full strength of the tidal current. When he looked around again, the jackdaw had vanished, but Mirabel and the dog were in sight, following the shorter route of the west side.

His beloved had found time in passing the house to don a hat and coat. She was now dressed exactly as when he had first seen her, poised in mid-air over the dread gulf of the Harp Rock. She sped over the uneven ground with all her wonted grace. She had a rhythmic elegance of movement in walking that was peculiarly attractive, and poor David swallowed a lump in his throat as he looked at her, for he wondered dully whether he should ever again watch those light, skimming steps carrying her nearer in witching beauty.

Soon she stood by his side, and it was clear that Mrs. Beringer was all agog with excitement at this renewed apparition.

"I come as an ambassador, David," said Mirabel, smiling with more than a hint of the elusive charm which it had been her lover's chief delight to surprise in her face. "My father agrees to let me make Mrs. Beringer's acquaintance, but there are conditions."

"I may be bound, but I cannot vouch for Doris," he said.

"They do not affect her. I have promised to answer no questions, and I am to return before those

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other men in the second boat reach the Corran. That is my part of the treaty. Yours is to keep everybody away from Argos and get all strangers off the island as speedily as may be. Do this, David dear, or I must go back at once."

She had walked quickly, and her lovely face was flushed. For the instant she was her old self, and David was so thankful to see her in this changed mood that he cudgled his brains to say what he wanted to say in such manner that the specter of the future should not mar their parting.

"You may rely on my best efforts in both respects, sweetheart," he said. "If these other men are journalists, and I persuade them to go back to their tug, need you run away before the *Fire-fly* is launched? That will be half an hour's job, at the least."

"I—I think not," she conceded. "There—your sister has seen the yacht. I like her even at this distance. She looks a dear."

"She has said the same thing about you to Phil a dozen times already. But—we cannot say much when the others are present—I want to ask you——"

"Article One of the treaty," she broke in.

"You may listen. If you may not answer, I must try another tack. The *Hawk* will arrive long before I get away. Will not the three of you go to Tobermorey to-day?"

She hesitated.

"I—I want to be able to say I kept my word,

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David," she murmured. He was thrilled by the wistfulness in her voice, yet he could not restrain the pleading that poured forth in an eager flood.

"But surely, my dear one, the stipulation affected other matters than the mere plans of the hour. You have promised to write to me, and you must not dream of permitting the laying of any embargo in that respect. I shall never lose track of you—never. I mean to devote my life to the one object—to freeing you from the net in which you have been so unfairly caught. . . . Yes, I admit that the treaty bars further discussion on that point, yet I fail to see how it affects your prospective trip on the *Hawk*."

She glanced at him from under drooping eyelids. ✓ "I believe that you and I do not need speech," she said slowly. "To-night, when I see a star wink, I shall say, 'That is David flashing his thoughts to me,' and you shall find that same star, dear, and read its silent message in your own way."

"I'll pick out your star, Mirabel, never fear, but I certainly would like to know from what part of the earth's surface you will be looking at it."

Again she seemed to be at a loss how to reconcile her implied promise not to give any details as to her father's projects with her desire to gratify her lover's very natural wish. They were at the lip of the spiral path now, and in a few seconds they would descend to the Corran in order to guide the boat to the few feet of shingle where alone it was

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safe to land at that stage of the tide. She looked across the scattered reefs to the horizon.

"That farthest point of Mull, just clear of the Carnburghs, is Treshnish," she said.

"Yes," said David, alert to catch the faintest breath of meaning in her words.

"Macdonald's cottage is tucked in there, in a tiny valley. From his door you can see Lunga. If—if even my spirit were roaming the island during the next few days—it would rejoice in the knowledge that one whom it loved was looking across the sea from that blue cliff sometimes—perhaps in the early morning, when the sun is gilding Cruachan from the east; perhaps at high noon, when our bare rock is revealed in all its stark ungainliness; perhaps at sunset, when the islands brood on the waters, dim and fairylike. . . . But that is just a little day-dream, David—the sort of conceit you used to encourage in me, and, like all dreams, it has to yield to the day's needs."

She ran down the path, and when David overtook her he said, with a fine air of indifference:

"Will Macdonald be on board the *Hawk*?"

"It is probable;" and she laughed, almost happily.

"One more question—the last—what am I to tell my sister?"

"What you will. As between you and me there are no secrets."

"No, thank God, nor any bolts or bars that I

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cannot smash. I go to Oban to-day, but I shall leave there to-night for Treshnish."

"Now that I know where to look for you, I shall be content, dear."

The coo in her voice was as sweetest music in David's ears. He had never loved her more than now that he was about to lose her.

The people in the boat could little guess what invisible flame of passion was consuming the two on the beach, but Beringer, having a sailor's eye for smart craft, whispered to his wife:

"By gad, Doris, it is easy to see why David was in no hurry to quit Lunga!"

"Oh, hush, Phil! They say she's married. But isn't she pretty?"

Beringer was too wary a bird to display an excess of enthusiasm, for his wife was herself a beautiful woman. Though singularly like her brother in many respects, notably in expression, the strength and power in David's features were softened in hers by the charm of femininity. David looked a man born to command—his sister possessed in equal measure the more subtle magnetism of her sex.

At the last moment Mirabel took charge of the landing.

"No, no!" she cried, when David would have directed the steersman to make for the beach at a right angle. "You must go at least three boats' lengths higher and back down with the stream. Pass close by that rock. There is plenty of water. . . ."

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Yes, that is right. Steady now till David gives you a pull with the boathook. . . . I am delighted to see you, Mrs. Beringer. . . . I feel I know you quite well after hearing your brother speak of you so much. I am sure you want to give him a good hug, for you must have passed a terribly anxious time."

The exigencies of landing on the island, an experience never devoid of danger unless at the slack of the tide in calm weather, kept David straining at the boathook while two sailors braced the boat against the current with their oars, so Mirabel perforce extended a hand to Mrs. Beringer, and uttered her welcoming words rather breathlessly. Her cultured voice accorded so thoroughly with her appearance that, of the two women, she who had mixed constantly in society seemed to be the less self-possessed. Naturally, Mrs. Beringer had formed all sorts of theories about this Lady of the Isles during the long journey to Oban, and while waiting there until her husband had chartered the *Clansman*, and never had her preconceived ideas as to any individuality been more upset than now.

David, realizing his sister's wonderment, cried cheerily:

"You may not hug the man at the boathook, Doris. Let me complete the introduction. This is Mirabel, Mirabel Locksley. And that is Carlo, a Scotch terrier with an Italian name. You will hear about the rest of the inhabitants in due course. These are the principal ones."

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By that time Mrs. Beringer had taken one long look at the girl's flushed, excited face. Then she flung her arms around her.

"If I may not kiss my brother, I may surely kiss you," she said.

What a perfect and sensitive instrument is the heart of a good woman! It detects and draws to itself a kindred soul as surely as the magnet attracts steel. When next those two gazed at each other their eyes were moist: neither dared utter a word for fear of weeping outright.

"Please, will Carlo fly at me if I sit down and howl?" said Beringer.

They smiled at that, and the tension relaxed. Some of the sailors relieved David, and he embraced his sister with brotherly offhandedness.

"And now," he said, assuming a businesslike air he was far from feeling, "I have not a second to lose. Hello! Tresidder, glad to see you alive and well. I thought you were gone to Davy Jones. Beringer, do me a favor. Jump in the boat again and pull out into the fairway until you meet a boatload of people coming up. I believe they are reporters——"

"Five special correspondents from London, and two local journalists," said his brother-in-law promptly.

"I want you to make them an offer in my behalf. Ask them to head straight for the *Clansman*, and await my arrival on board in the course of an hour or so. If they will do that, I undertake to tell them

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all they want to know. If they refuse, neither I nor any other person who can speak with authority will say a word. In any event, Mr. Locksley, the tenant of the island, refuses permission to land. Put it the best way you can, old chap, but stop them from coming here."

Beringer promised to try his powers of persuasion, and the gig put off again. Already a ripple in the current showed the whereabouts of the sunken rock on which she might have been upset had not Mirabel indicated the only practicable channel.

"You don't mean that boat, I suppose?" shouted Beringer, pointing across the reef.

"No; those are local men. You'll find the other one abreast of the cliff where you first saw me."

Meanwhile, Mirabel and Doris were talking as only two women could talk in the circumstances. The one was telling of David's fight for life and escape from the storm, and the other was voluble as to the sensation and veritable despair caused by Tresidder's account of the accident to the yacht.

Mrs. Beringer had overheard David's request to her husband, so she said nothing calculated to embarrass a girl for whom she had conceived a very real if sudden friendship, but she marveled that no other inhabitant of the island appeared, while the utterly bleak aspect of Lunga induced an obvious question.

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"It all sounds like the wildest romance," she said. "But where do you live? David and you have been on this bare rock nearly a fortnight, yet you both are spick and span as though we had met you in Oban. The only houses I have seen are absolute ruins. Don't tell me you dwell in a cave!"

"We have a very comfortable house," smiled Mirabel. "My father and a Mr. Hawley are there at this moment. It is tucked in at the foot of the hill on which we were standing when you put off from the steamer. But my father declines to receive visitors, so I cannot ask you to come to the place."

"A Mr. Hawley," mused Doris. "Is that the way she alludes to her husband? Or can there be a sister?"

"We saw four people distinctly," she said aloud.

"Yes. There are no others on Lunga at present. In fact, four is the usual number. When my father and I come here in the summer we bring our servants, a Frenchman and his wife, from London. Sometimes there is a fifth, Macdonald, who lives at Treshnish, that point over there on Mull. He is our link with the world and the shops."

"What an idyllic existence!" sighed Doris, who was noted as the best-dressed woman in her set, and even imported her *dessous* from New York.

"It has been that," agreed Mirabel. "But is it

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not true that one seldom, if ever, discovers one's own idyl until it is ended? Daphnis only became celebrated by his dirge."

"David's affair is serious," thought Doris. But aloud she said laughingly:

"I'm afraid I don't quite follow you. I have heard of Daphnis and Chloe, of course, but I have always associated them with Dresden china figures, a handsome young shepherd and a delightful shepherdess."

"You don't read Greek, then?"

"Good gracious, no!"

"Ah! you ought to learn Greek. It is the fount of literature and the arts. Your brother would soon acquire it. One evening I took him through that very poem by Theocritus—the Dirge, I mean—and he acquitted himself quite well."

"David always had a marvelous knack of mastering anything in which he was really interested," said Doris, aware of a species of vertigo which seemed to convert stony Lunga into an enchanted island.

Hours afterwards, when alone with her husband, she explained her sensations thuswise:

"Can you wonder at me being a little light-headed, Phil?" she asked. "There was I, walking about a scrap of beach on a barren rock off the coast of Scotland, trying to hold my own with a girl who looked and spoke like a Greek goddess dressed in

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a shooting costume designed for the Highlands in August. I don't blame David a little bit for falling in love with her—do you?"

"Trying to put myself in David's position——" began Beringer.

"Oh, don't be silly! She would turn any man's head. Just picture her sailing into a London drawing-room in a Paquin gown and talking Greek or Latin like an Oxford professor!"

"She would create a riot," said Beringer.

"Poor David! He says——"

It can well be imagined what David said to his sister and brother-in-law when he had satisfied the reporters, and had made an eloquent appeal, which was completely successful, that they should avoid giving pain to the Locksley household by further allusions to the Dover escapade.

But first he had to take leave of Mirabel. When the *Fire-fly* was launched, with the aid of the rollers and many strong arms, and he had secured a few words with Macdonald, the time came when there was no longer any reason for delay.

"Good-by!" he said, very quietly, holding her right hand in both of his. "I shall see you again to-morrow, perhaps at eight o'clock, most certainly at noon and sunset, and thenceforth every day until you leave the island."

"Thank you, David," was all she said in reply; but Mrs. Beringer, who alone was near enough to overhear their parting words, for they made no

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secret of them, and spoke in ordinary tones, was sure that the passage of the reef in the boat, or the sun, or something, had made her head swim. That, of course, was before David had told his story.

Then, being a woman, she understood exactly, and her kind heart was troubled, for she could see only one way out of the maze, and that was a way her brother and his island goddess would never take.



CHAPTER XV

THE STRANGER FROM AMERICA

FOUR days later, on the Friday evening to be exact, David received his first letter from Mirabel. He was sitting on an upturned tub outside Macdonald's cottage at Treshnish, smoking the pipe of peace, if not of content, and looking at Lunga over a sea still unvexed by bad weather, when the fisherman came up the brae.

At such an hour, when the sun was sinking over Tiree in regal panoply of purple and gold, when even the Atlantic rollers broke listlessly on the black fringe of Haum Point, and myriads of seabirds were winging their way to twilight and the cliffs, the three cozy cottages which sheltered Macdonald, his wife, his wife's brother, and a cousin—each household fairly prosperous, and each pullulating with sturdy children—were indeed a haven of rest. To David, at first, they brought Nirvana. In this placid nook of the West the storm and stress of life seemed to have ended. Each day and all day Lunga gleamed on the waters, and David's spirit bridged the void in sweet communion with his beloved.

But, on this fourth day, the Buddhistic extinc-

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tion of thought itself had yielded to a restlessness which could only be assuaged by work. David could not explain the feeling. He only knew that the period of inaction had passed, so he took pen and paper and jotted down every fact and fancy retained by a tenacious memory which seemed to bear in the slightest degree on Mirabel's history. Of course, he did this with a purpose. He felt that soon, whether within a few hours or a week, it really did not seem to matter while one dwelt at Haum Point, Macdonald would come with news of Mirabel's departure from the island with her father and Hawley. Then, indeed, he would be up and doing. They must be followed, and Mirabel must be guarded, quietly, unobtrusively, but with such thoroughness and efficiency that she should never cease to have confidence in the nearness of a trustworthy friend.

To render that silent struggle in her behalf really effective he must obtain help. Men skilled in the unveiling of secrets hidden beneath the years must lay bare the past records of the two men who had trapped Mirabel into a cruel and degrading marriage. His own solicitors, a firm of the highest standing and experience, should obtain the best legal opinion as to her present position in the eyes of the law. For Mirabel herself had flouted the notion of any divine mandate being attached to a ceremony for which her father had wrung from her an unwilling consent. That was David's sheet anchor in the maelstrom of recent events on Lunga. Had

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Mirabel been Hawley's wife in the eye of God, any man of honor must have torn himself away from her. But she was not, nor ever would be, Hawley's wife other than by presumption of the law, and David respected the law because he had faith in it. If the law could effect a great wrong, it should be equally powerful in behalf of right. Mirabel had fled from the husband given her by the law, and had taken to her pure heart the mate flung at her feet by the storm. The law had erred; it must be made to rectify its blunder.

So David hoped, and trusted, and prayed, and on that fourth day of separation from Mirabel he began to marshal his forces for the fray.

The last words borne on the writing-pad on his knee showed the drift of his mind:

"An active fear seemed to abide with Locksley during every moment I spent in his presence, and Hawley shared that fear, though, as it seemed, for very different reasons. Searching my limited knowledge of human nature for parallels, I would compare Locksley to a man cowering by a campfire in constant dread of an unseen lion's spring from out of the darkness, but Hawley might be likened to an undiscovered spy sitting at his enemy's table."

Thus far had he written when his eyes dwelt on the Highlander's active figure climbing from the shore—the long, swinging strides of the born mountaineer making light of a back-breaking gradient.

David leaped up with a shout which brought Mrs. Macdonald to the door of her cottage.

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"They'll be wanting something on Lunga," she said, with a quiet sarcasm that was not wholly unconscious.

Although Locksley's tenancy of the island brought grist to the mill of the Macdonald family, when Argos was inhabited the fisherman was away from home oftener and for longer periods than his good wife altogether approved of. She had reconciled herself to the loneliness of the summer months, but this late autumn visit was unprecedented, and she wished the Locksleys would betake themselves, bag and baggage, to their winter quarters.

As for David, his arrival had fluttered the simple cottagers at Treshnish during the ensuing twenty-four hours. Macdonald's brief note had told his "dear Meg" that Sir David Lindsay was to "bide in the house till I come," and Sir David had bided there, and was just as homely and pleasant in his ways as one of themselves, so the tremors of "doing for" a real live baronet soon merged into placid wonderment at his singular habit of gazing seaward nearly all day long.

"I have been writing without a break throughout the afternoon, or I would surely have seen the coble on its way, Mrs. Macdonald," said David.

"There's a bit breeze from the sou'east, sir, an' the tide runs out there a good two hours afore we feel it here. Aiblins, Tonal' would cut across for Loch Tuadh, an' come up the coast wi' a fu' sheet."

And that was exactly what Donald had done, but

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David paid scant heed to the why and wherefore of sailing maneuvers when the fisherman handed him a letter. Though he had never seen Mirabel's handwriting, his eyes fell on the one word "David" written on the envelope, and the script struck him instantly as being quite as characteristic of Mirabel as the delightful intimacy of the simple address.

Nevertheless, before opening it, he had one eager question to put.

"All well on Lunga, Donald?"

"Ou, aye," admitted Donald grudgingly. In fact, the monosyllables conveyed the information quite clearly that the island's inhabitants were well enough in health, but "no sae gleg" in other respects.

"I'll read this first; then you must give me your news;" and back went David to his tub.

The letter consisted of five closely filled sheets, evidently one for each day, as its method quickly revealed.

"My David! [it began, under the heading "Monday"]. So you have gone, and I am sitting in my hiding-place on the Harp Rock, which you have never seen, to write you my first letter. In the few stories I have read concerning the hap of young men and maidens, such a letter would treat of love. It might speak of the common things of life, but the breath of love would sigh gently from each line, and its sparks glimmer from the white page like a vein of gold from a wall of quartz. But, as between you and me, talk of love is dead and done with. Believe me, David, that must be so. I have known it ever since my father told me something of my mother's death and its causes. I think he realized what

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a dagger-thrust he had given me, for he has assured me that no threat of Hawley's will ever part us again; but, for all that, the wound smarted sorely to-day while I watched the last trail of smoke dying in the blue horizon, long after your ship was hidden by Iona.

"And now, for the first time, my own Green Isle gives me a sense of loneliness. I came here, across that chasm which you detest, just because you had never visited my chosen retreat. Gladly would I have brought you—for I thought I had no secrets from you except one, and, when the greater gods forced that from my lips, I found that you and I already shared another secret, a secret which will forever dwarf in my mind the pitiful little tragedy vouched for by some London registrar. But, do you remember? you shuddered at the thought of my taking that perilous passage, and, even thus early, I rejoiced in your care for me, so I never suggested that we should dare Fate together and visit my cave. It lies on the seaward side of the rock; years ago, by right of conquest, I expelled from its recesses a colony of puffins. Now I am sitting in it, with Carlo at my feet, writing to you, thinking of you. I sought the Harp Rock as the one spot in Lunga where we had no memories in common, and it has failed me so scandalously that, after I have hidden my plank-bridge in a chink of gnarled old Cruachan, I fancy I shall not revisit the Rock for many a day. Does that please you, David? Are you knitting your brows in that intellectual frown which you deemed so effective when I dared rarely to disagree with your lordly opinions? And, when I stole a peep at you, how your baronial air would melt into a smile! Did ever man and woman, or boy and girl—for that is what we were, you the veriest schoolboy enjoying a holiday and I a girl who, judged by her indifference to the world and its sorrows, should have worn her hair long and her skirts short—yet, did ever two young people in the world before dwell together under such conditions and pry and peer into each other's souls so candidly and honestly as you and I? I think not. I am vain enough to say—I hope not. I want to hug the delusion that we alone—

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"Tuesday. I have read through what I wrote yesterday. I see now why the pen stopped so abruptly. But I could not see then, David, for my eyes were dim, so to-day I mean to keep my errant thoughts within bounds. I am writing in my bedroom. To and fro in the Dorlin are walking my father and Mr. Hawley. That courtesy prefix slipped in quite naturally before the man's name. Can you hear the jackdaw saying it—Mr. Hawley? There have been many discussions, even words of hot anger have reached my ear. My father is fixed in his determination to remain on Lunga until the newspapers have forgotten your adventure and my flight, whereas Hawley is fierce to be gone. He says he is called to London by business which is imperative and demands his personal attention. You do not know, unless you have spoken to some member of the *Hawk's* crew, that Donald brought newspapers and letters for Hawley from the Calgary post-office. Hawley is aware of my father's ban on newspapers, so these are left undisturbed in his room, but I am sure he has either read something in one of them, or heard it more directly in a letter, which is perplexing him greatly, and, in his case, perplexity means irritation. Of course, I am only guessing, since both my father and he, while in my presence, studiously avoid any direct reference to the dispute concerning our departure.

"Last night they discussed America. My father quoted a verse from Horace, and Hawley sat mum. Whereupon dad said to him: 'I know you are no lover of the classics, but it is impossible that you should have wholly forgotten the Latinity ground into you at Harvard?' Hawley passed it off in his loud way, but I was sure, and I believe that dad suspected, he had no more notion of the meaning of the lines than if he were a Choctaw Indian. That is odd, isn't it? for a university graduate. My father has always told me that universities waste the best years of youth, but they taught you some Latin at Oxford, David, and I suppose the system achieves similar results at Harvard.

"Wednesday. This morning a queer thing happened. You are aware that we never lock or bolt a door in Argos; though

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I must qualify that word 'never' into 'seldom'; because I, being rather frightened really when you called me a 'little plum,' did lock my bedroom door on that first night; and Donald shot a bolt in the front door when—ah, me! never mind when—but, for all that, it is not a custom of the house. It seems, though, that Mr. Hawley locks himself into his bedroom every night! This morning, some spring or other having become oxidized through damp and disuse, the lock would not work and Hawley found himself a prisoner. Donald threw him a screwdriver through the window, but the screws had rusted in the wood, owing to the humidity of the winter months, and, at last, for even a Hawley must eat, we reared a ladder and he escaped in that way. It was our only ladder—a long one, intended for use if repairs are needed on the roof,—so Hawley made a rather undignified exit, because Donald would not let me risk the raising of it properly and we stuck one end in at the open window and jammed the other against the garden wall.

“Donald wanted to go into the room and try the persuasion of his strong hands on the reluctant screws, but Hawley would not hear of it; he said he would be able to prize or cut the lock open with a hammer and chisel after breakfast. Now, the point is that no one could possibly enter the room in the meantime, except by way of the ladder, and the four of us were at table together. When the meal was ended, Donald had to go to the Corran for the hammer and chisel, as he was obeying your last instructions, and chipping initials and a date on the rock in front of which poor Farrow lies buried. Yet, when Hawley climbed up again, and, after much din and effort, broke the lock, he came downstairs with a face as white as a ghost, and asked if I had seen some papers which must have blown out of his room. There has been hardly enough breeze since sunrise to fill a sail. You know how and why I am such an authority on the day's weather, David, because soon after dawn I was standing on the cliff looking straight at you on Haum Point. I told him the thing was absolutely impossible; but he hunted everywhere he could think of—in the garden, on the level plot beyond, in

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the Dorlin, even up the slopes of the horseshoe. He has worried me all day about the blessed papers; he actually sneaked after me at noon when Carlo and I strolled to the north end to send you another greeting. I believe the creature thinks I have got them.

"*Thursday.* My father is ill. I am sure he caught a chill yesterday. After lunch he went and sat a couple of hours in his favorite sanctum, his hobby, the hollow where he cultivates ferns and mosses; but the end of October is not like midsummer, and, mild as the weather is, some icy draught may have crept through the cave, noiseless and cruel as an Italian desperado, and stuck its stiletto into him. He says I am mistaken and that his *malaise* is not of the body, but, for the first and only time, Hawley and I have agreed in urging him to leave the island and go to some place where a doctor can be obtained. I am really quite unhappy about him. If he is not restored to better health to-morrow, I shall insist that Donald goes for the *Hawk*. Indeed, if matters are serious, I shall not hesitate to bring both him and Hawley to Treshnish in the coble. Of course, that would be awkward for you, dear, but what is one to do when illness threatens? Usually, my father is our physician and surgeon. He always carries a well-equipped medicine chest, which he will never allow me to touch, but to-day he seems to have lost vitality; yet, when I beg of him to let Donald summon the launch to take us to Oban, he refuses so persistently and so gently that I am forced to remain silent, while at heart I am more alarmed than ever. If Donald leaves soon, and we do not accompany him, I shall send you these pages of my diary just as they are written. One day's musings may seem to contradict another's, but you must read my mood as it passes, and to-day, for the first time in my existence, I have seen a darker shadow even than that which has cast its gloom over my own life. I told you once that I did not fear death. For myself, I do not—it may be, perhaps, because it still lurks beyond some mountain range of experience whose snows have not peered above my horizon—but it would be a blighting and unbearable thing if Fate were to snatch my father from me

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now. Is that a selfish thought? I fear so. Alack, my David, I am woesgone, so let me close in a happier note and say that I am glad you will not be plagued with these disjointed outpourings until it is settled irrevocably whether we go to-morrow, or remain—till when? I cannot tell you. Hawley is raving about that and his lost papers; but he will not go without us. He fears he will never see me again if once he loses sight of me. Somehow, I can read the man's thoughts, though I do truly believe that the effort to pry into his dark soul makes me feel mean and ignoble.

"I have a minor trouble, too. You know how Jack loved the fireside of an evening. Well, he hopped away from the house after lunch to-day and has not returned. I am writing again in my bedroom—this time by candle-light, and I shrilled his name all over the island after dusk. Besides, he would soon make a row if he came back and found the door closed against him. Donald thinks he has been killed by some kestrel or buzzard from the mainland—he, who could scare eagles! David, you once called me a little girl, and I am a miserable little girl to-night.

"*Friday.* My father says that his indisposition, such as it was, has gone. There was quite a scene between him and Hawley at breakfast. Hawley is mad to be in London, and dad annoyed him beyond endurance by talking of the prospects of mild weather on the island until the beginning of the New Year. I cannot account for my father's attitude. I used to think I knew his every mood, but Hawley has inoculated him with a virus which produces symptoms I do not recognize. Really, he played with him to-day as a cat plays with a mouse, than which no Spanish inquisitor ever devised more torturing gambols. Were I writing of any other person in the wide world, I should have told you that dad was taunting the man, trying to draw from him some cry of rage and dismay which would lay bare his hidden thought. But that is so unlike my own dear father that I can hardly bring myself to credit it. . . . Hawley has been in a towering passion all day. You see, David, he is really in a rather helpless position. Donald is our link with the world; Donald will

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only obey our orders; Donald would bring me Hawley's head on a charger, I do believe, if I demanded the dish with half the spite of a Salomé.

"And the latest cause of Hawley's fuming is my father's wish that Donald should go to Treshnish to-day and replenish our larder!

"I put your letter to my lips, and am ever your Mirabel.

"P. S.—Yet I close with a sob of mourning. My poor jackdaw *is* dead. He must be dead! I have not seen him for twenty-four hours. If living, he is not on Lunga."

So those few sheets of paper had been pressed to Mirabel's lips! David did not even look around to see if anyone was watching before he kissed them fervently. They brought her so near that they yielded a fragrance of violets! She must have scattered on the sheets, before placing them in the envelope, a few drops of that perfume which she favored. As a rule, David disliked scent, but he had never inhaled such a perfect and subtle essence of the veritable flower as the *Violette de Parma* which Mirabel used. One day he had chaffed her on the exquisite bouquet of her tincture of orris-root, and she told him that her father had become friendly with an old manufacturer of scents at Grasse, who, in return for a scientific tip about the vaporizing of oils, had given him a stone jar holding about a gallon of some powerful decoction, a teaspoonful of which would convert eight ounces of distilled water into a perfume regarded by a famous empress as her own exclusive possession.

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And, as the letter diffused its scent, so did it live and breathe with Mirabel's personality. Beneath its restraint, its valiant effort to appear somewhat reconciled to her lot, he could feel the wild pulsing of her heart. She wanted to tell him, but dared not, that she was ever dreaming of the hour when he would again clasp her in his arms. "As between you and me, talk of love is dead and done with," she wrote. Yet how quickly had she removed the ban! "I put your letter to my lips!" "Your" letter, not "my" letter. The palpitating words were hers, but the letter was David's, and well she knew how he would treasure it. Lunga was now a tiny bar of deepest blue on the horizon, with Cruachan thrusting its diminished curve heavenward, but Mirabel was there—thinking of him even in that moment, and her eyes were shining in reflex of thoughts her pen had not striven to phrase.

It was nearly night when he entered the cottage. Donald was seated at the table in the living-room, eating a meal for which the long trip from the island had well prepared him. There was an extra spread of good fare, for David's presence had brought unheard-of delicacies to Haum Point, and Mrs. MacDonald had gone to the door many minutes since in order to summon her distinguished guest.

But Donald had stopped her.

"Let him bide, Meg," he said. "He'll no be for bite or sup till he's dune wi' yon packet I brocht frae Miss Meerabel."

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"Well, Donald," said David, taking his place at the board, "I hear that the jackdaw is missing."

"Aye, he's deid," said the other.

"You cannot be quite sure of that."

"But I am, Sir David."

"Why?"

"Because I saw that scamp, Hawley, wringin' his neck."

David laid down the knife and fork he was using on an excellent chicken. Macdonald's statement astounded him, as well it might, but he understood the man's character so well that he did not dream of questioning it.

"Why didn't you tell Miss Mirabel?" he asked, by no means angrily, for he felt that her devoted henchman would give a good reason for his reticence.

"Puir lassie, she'll hae trouble eneuch, I'm thinkin'. An' I'll no be sayin' there wasna' a notion at the back of ma heid that Mr. Locksley micht hae mair of a free han' wi' Hawley, if Miss Meerabel didna ken the truth."

David resumed his supper. Macdonald must be left to tell his story in his own way. At that instant, Donald's cousin, a McDougall, entered the cottage with a small parcel which had come by post to Calgary, the neighboring village. Ah, joy! Here were mounted prints from the Oban photographer to whom David had intrusted his films. Soon everybody was admiring a dozen pictures of Mirabel. They were all first-rate. Some of the snapshots had



"HE PEERED LONG AND CAREFULLY AT A BUNDLE OF PAPERS." *Page 291.*

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caught her in lifelike pose, and the more ambitious time exposures had produced three capital portraits.

"Gosh!" cried Donald, "they're fine! I maun hae the pick o' them, Sir David, when I go back the morn. She'll be as pleased as a bairn wi' a new toy."

David arranged his art gallery against various utensils on the table, and the fisherman, well aware of the importance of his story, revealed the tragic fate which had overtaken one notable inhabitant of the island since David had quitted it.

Put briefly, and in plain English, the jackdaw undoubtedly had climbed into Hawley's bedroom by hopping up the rungs of the ladder, and had purloined therefrom a packet of papers. It was evident that the bird took his plunder straight to the double-ended cave which led to the sea from the hollow in the southern part of the island, and that they were found there, and examined in detail, by Mr. Locksley. Of the latter fact Donald was certain, because he had climbed down the cliff at the south-westerly tip of Lunga, and was hauling in lobster-pots on a reef famous for its occasional catches in fine weather, when he saw Locksley emerge from the tunnel and hide in a cleft, while he peered long and carefully at a bundle of documents.

As Donald had heard of Hawley's loss, he drew his own conclusions and held his tongue. At dusk that evening, he was setting out the lobster-pots again when a muffled scream from the cave made him

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look around quickly. Hawley appeared, and Donald instantly became a part of the low-lying reef. The jackdaw was lying inert in the man's hands, but such was his spite and venom that he nearly twisted its head off.

"Man, I would hae liked tae stop him," growled the fisherman, "but I kenned weel it was ower late tae save the puir bit birdie, so I just snuggled intil the lang weed ahint a rock, an' watched. He chucked the deid daw on the reef, an' pu'd they papers oot of a pocket. Gosh, they micht hae bin bank notes the way he thumbed them tae mak' siccar nane were missin'. Then, bethinkin' hisself, he picks up the daw again, an' gaes through the cave. Dash me if he didna pass Miss Meerabel wi' yon little black body in his pouch an' she crying 'Jack, Jack' in a voice that wad melt the heart of a stane, an' naethin' would serve but that he maun fling the creetur intil the crack atween Dun Chruit an' Cruachan."

"You saw him?" said David, with a grim voice of one who had heard the story of a murder.

"Aye, I stalked him fine, Sir David."

"You did not mention the fact to Mr. Locksley."

"Not a word. He knew what was in they papers, an' Hawley thocht he was safe when he found the jackdaw had ta'en 'em. The puir bird would be nebbin' them in play when Hawley kem on him, the ——— pirate!"

"Donald!" remonstrated his wife, though she, too, was furiously angry, because the jackdaw lived

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in the cottage when Mirabel was not on Lunga, and was a great favorite with her and the children.

“Aye, Meg, that’s what he is.”

“I think you behaved very wisely, Donald,” said David. “You will not whisper a syllable of this to Miss Mirabel when you return?”

“Nae fear! Had I tellt her to-day—weel, there was a shotgun handy, an’ I’m thinkin’ Hawley might have had a bit accident.”

Of course, it was impossible to guess what was in the papers, but David could not help connecting Locksley’s sudden illness with some discovery he had made while going through them. Macdonald’s story was built up partly of knowledge and partly of assumption, though there could be no manner of doubt that Hawley had killed Mirabel’s pet. For the rest, reading events on the island in the light of the girl’s letter, David realized that the pact between Hawley and her father had been strained, if not entirely sundered, and, if that were so, the jackdaw had indeed rendered his mistress a service which more than repaid the affection and care she had lavished on him during the past four years.

David was about to ask the fisherman for his impressions as to Locksley’s manner towards Hawley subsequent to his perusal of the missing documents, when he was interrupted by the unusual sound of wheels outside the cottage. Rarely, indeed, did any vehicle, other than a cart, dare the mountain track which led to Haum Point from Calgary and Tresh-

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nish. And this was no country cart, for two horses were trotting across the tiny plateau on which the houses stood, and, when a halt was made, the listeners heard the click of a brake.

Neither of the men moved, but Mrs. Macdonald went to the door. She had opened it before a tall man standing on the threshold was given time to knock. He had just alighted from a mail-phaeton which she recognized as belonging to a hotel proprietor at Tobermorey, but the newcomer was a complete stranger. When he spoke, his voice was pleasant and subdued, but singularly clear.

"This is Donald Macdonald's cottage, I am told," he said.

"Yes, sir," said the awed Meg.

"You have Sir David Lindsay staying here. Will you kindly say that Mr. William K. Elwin would like to see him?"

David knew instantly that the man with the low-toned, penetrating voice was an American, and he fancied, too, from the form and manner of the visitor's speech, an American who was accustomed to having his own way, no matter what obstacles he might encounter.

"Come in, Mr. Elwin!" he cried cheerfully. "I am having supper, and I have no other apartment in which to receive you."

There entered the cottage a tall, somewhat attenuated man of middle age. His abundant hair was white, but his figure was erect as a lance, and the

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gray eyes which swept the room and its occupants in quick survey were keen and shrewd. Contrary to the habit of most men, he did not smile as he explained his errand.

“ I had the rare good-fortune to meet your sister, the Honorable Mrs. Beringer, in Edinburgh,” he said. “ She told me I would find you at Treshnish. Perhaps, when you have ended your meal, you will favor me with a few minutes’ private talk, here or out-of-doors.”

Before David could reply, Macdonald broke in.

“ Ye said yer name was Mr. William K. Elwin? ” he exclaimed.

“ And that is the fact, my friend,” was the good-humored but unsmiling reply.

“ Frae New York? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Frae the Plaza Hotel, New York? ”

“ Yes.”

The fisherman took an envelope from the breast-pocket of his coat.

“ Here’s a bit letter for ye, Mr. Elwin,” he said. “ A man named Hawley asked me tae post it. I’m thinkin’ noo I’ll be savin’ the stamp.”

But Mr. William K. Elwin, of the Plaza Hotel, New York, disregarded the letter which had reached its addressee under circumstances that might reasonably be described as miraculous. His glance had rested on the array of photographs spread over the table, and the hand which he was in the act of ex-

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tending to receive Hawley's missive helped instead to steady his tottering limbs by clutching the back of David's chair.

"Who is that?" he said, with a curious thickness of utterance, swaying a little, but continuing to devour the pictures with his eyes, especially, David noted, a snapshot in which Mirabel, taken in profile, was glancing sideways with that smiling droop of the eyelids which was so peculiarly captivating.

Yet he did not seem to want an answer.

David was in no hurry to make known Mirabel's name and whereabouts to a man he had never before seen, but the stranger gave not the slightest heed to the hush which had fallen on the others. His face, which was pale and care-lined, grew whiter, and the strong, closely compressed lips quivered with some great emotion. And when he spoke again, it was not to repeat the question.

"Thank God!" he said softly. "After twenty years! . . . Still, I have found her. . . . So, again, thank God!"

CHAPTER XVI

SOME DOUBTS—AND A GREAT CERTAINTY

Now, there are men and women of the Celtic and Latin races on whose lips such invocations are little else than a emotional outburst. But these fervent words came straight from this man's heart. He could not have repressed them, even had he willed it. Nevertheless, hysteria was as foreign to one of his temperament as to either of the awe-stricken men who watched and listened in silence; for the native-born American is deeply tinged with the grave and decorous spirit of Puritanism, and does not yield one jot to the average Briton in sensitiveness where phrases that jar and grate on the unaccustomed ear are concerned.

Indeed, he seemed to know, in a dazed way, that he had said something strange and bizarre, for he checked himself when about to give some explanation of his astonishing outburst, and evidently made a violent and partly successful effort to regain self-control.

David failed completely to extract any meaning from the newcomer's disjointed utterances. Whom had this man been seeking during twenty years?

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Surely not Mirabel? Twenty years ago she was a dimpled infant in her mother's arms. Yet he had thanked God for the mere sight of her in a photograph, and his broken words implied, if they meant anything, that his long search had ended in that moment!

His agitation was so marked that, after the first whiff of amazement had passed, David rose and asked him to be seated. It hardly needed a second glance to learn that Mr. William K. Elwyn was a man of distinction. If his clothes were in rags and his boots down at heel, one look at his worn, intelligent face would raise instant question as to how such a man could have sunk to the gutter. But he was dressed with a simplicity which was certainly not inexpensive, and his assured and self-possessed air on entering the cottage had showed that he counted on being well received when he made himself known.

David, though surprised beyond measure, did not allow his judgment to be warped by the phenomenon that a letter from Hawley intended for this very man should have been produced by Macdonald. He had no doubt that a remarkable incident would soon be cleared up; meanwhile he urged his unexpected visitor to partake of some stimulant, and politely regretted that he could only offer whisky or beer.

Then Mr. Elwyn smiled, for the first time.

"May I have a glass of water?" he said. "Per-

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haps, a little later, I may trespass further on your hospitality, as I have eaten nothing since the early morning. Pray excuse me—I was not prepared for this”—and, resting an elbow on the table to support his head, he again examined that same photograph of Mirabel with an intensity and wistfulness which went far beyond the bounds of mere interest.

“Will you not tell me this young lady’s name, Sir David?” he went on, without lifting his eyes from the picture, though reverting in some degree to the quiet, precise tone of his earlier utterances.

“Mirabel Locksley,” said David, deciding at once that, if a crisis were imminent, no good purpose could be served by withholding Mirabel’s identity.

“Ah! Were these photographs taken recently?” Still retaining the one print, he glanced at the others.

“Seven days ago.”

“Do you consider them fairly accurate?”

“I am an amateur photographer, so it is not to be expected that they should do her justice; still, they convey a fair notion of her appearance.”

“’Deed, Sir David, they’re just her livin’ image,” put in Macdonald, and the homely Scottish accents helped to relax the strain.

“She is now on Lunga, I suppose, together with Mr. Locksley—and my correspondent, James Hawley”—and Mr. Elwyn seemed to indicate the unopened letter which he had thrown on the table.

“Yes,” said David.

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"Is there any means of reaching Lunga to-night?"

"It all depends on the purpose for which you wish to go there."

Elwyn looked up, and the eyes of the two met, not in contest, but rather in weighing, searching scrutiny.

"Does that mean that I can reach the island within a few hours, but only if you think fit, Sir David?"

"The thing is practically impossible to-night. It would entail crossing a reef-infested sea in the dark. Nothing short of a matter of life or death would justify the attempt."

"Not if one had waited twenty years for that one thing?"

"You speak in enigmas, Mr. Elwyn. Let me set you a good example. If your visit to Lunga is calculated to annoy or harass Miss Locksley or her father, I shall certainly prevent your enterprise to-night, and endeavor to interfere with it very strenuously in the morning, or any other day—if necessary, for a second period of twenty years."

Again the faintest glimmer of a smile brightened the older man's drawn face.

"Good!" he said. "Your sister warned me that you were impetuous. . . . Please, may I eat? And can I obtain a bed of any sort in this house, or in some neighboring cottage? You and I will probably sit up the better part of the night, for I have

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much to say, and to hear, but food and rest are not to be denied—at my age. If a bed is forthcoming, the man in charge of the horses and trap must find accommodation somewhere. I have hired the rig indefinitely, as it may be wanted for a variety of purposes.”

David, in his way, was as masterful and self-contained as the American. He bade Mrs. Macdonald attend to Mr. Elwyn's needs, and himself went out to arrange for a room which he knew was vacant in McDougall's house. He was followed by Donald.

“Wha the deevil is he?” inquired the fisherman, when the door had closed on them.

“The man whom Locksley has been avoiding ever since his daughter was born,” said David, half unconsciously uttering his thoughts aloud.

“Gosh, Mr. Elwyn didna fash hissel' i' the hunt. But whatt for will he no tak' a squint at yon bit letter? Hello, Johnnie Broon!”—this to a youth standing by a pair of steaming galloways. “Ye'll hae brocht the gentleman frae Tobermorey, I'm thinkin'?”

“Aye,” said Brown.

“He'd cross by the ferry?”

“Aye.”

“An' he'll hae fee'd ye weel tae haud yer tongue?”

For answer Brown whistled a couple of bars of a jig.

“Ye'll whistle a when different chune afore ye

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lap a gill o' whusky this side o' Treshnish, ma cannie lad," said Macdonald grimly.

Evidently, there was more in this piece of quiet sarcasm than met the eye, for Brown became communicative.

"I've tellt ye a' there wass tae tell," he grumbled. "Scarce a wor-r-d did the man speak the whole road frae Tobermorey."

David left them, after bidding Macdonald help the driver in regard to stabling for the horses. He was glad of the breathing-space afforded by the short walk to and from McDougall's dwelling. The thought had suddenly leaped into his mind that Locksley, while shunning all the world, had placed a special ban on Americans and photographers. What a sinister coincidence it was, then, that an American should arrive at remote Treshnish on an urgent errand to Lunga, and that the man should be moved so powerfully by sight of a photograph of Mirabel!

It was odd, too, that he himself should not hail the occurrence as of good omen. He felt ill at ease. His mind was weighed down by a sense of impending disaster. He was like a man groping in the dark, yet acutely conscious of being in the presence of some evil mystery. His hands might blunder at any moment on the evidences of its existence, yet his eyes might be blinded to its real significance. He racked his brain vainly for a plausible theory which would account for Elwyn's visit to Mull. To calm him-

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self, and order his jumbled thoughts, he halted a while by the roadside.

The night was fine, and the moon, just rising above the hills, threw a faint radiance over the sea. The Carnburghs and Fladda were clean-cut cameos in the dark-blue expanse, but Lunga was hidden in a slight mist, luminous, yet opaque. He wondered what Locksley was thinking of at that moment. Was he afraid lest some blaze of lightning should sear his gray life? Was Jove fashioning his thunderbolts even then, in a humble cottage on Haum Point? He could not guess—the irruption of this elderly American into the maze and muddle of affairs in Lunga was the most puzzling feature of a problem that bristled with difficulties.

When he returned to his own abode, the men had gone with vehicle and horses. Mr. Elwyn was finishing a simple meal. He had eaten little and drank only water. Hawley's letter still lay where he had placed it, and the envelope remained closed.

"Do you smoke, Sir David?" asked the stranger, when Lindsay had told him that a fire was being lighted in a spare bedroom by Mrs. McDougall.

"Yes," said David, looking around for a box of cigars.

"Take one of these;" and the other held out a leather case. "They are excellent Havanas—the best of their leaf, I believe. I am not a smoker, but I carry the wherewithal for my friends."

Obviously, the best thing to do was to fall in with

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this singular person's mood. David, himself somewhat of a connoisseur in tobacco, recognized with the first whiff that he had been given a cigar of a quality which can never be bought in shops.

"You cannot have sampled your own wares, Mr. Elwyn, or you would certainly acquire one vice, at any rate," he said.

"Oh, I am only a converted sinner. I have neither smoked nor touched intoxicants for twenty years."

That particular period of time seemed to be an obsession with the man. He dwelt on the words as though they represented an epoch. He uttered them, too, with an air of finality. By this time, David would hardly have been surprised if he had said:

"I vowed to neither smoke nor drink for twenty years. I have kept my promise. Both restrictions cease to-night. Kindly pass the whisky—and—can you oblige me with a match?"

But Mr. Elwyn did not carry realism so far. He seemed to become aware that David was waiting patiently for an explanation of his presence.

"I gather that the room in the other cottage is at our service," he said. "Suppose we go there? You will not have any qualms about coming out into the night air at a late hour, but I have to guard against such excesses. And I am sure Mrs. Macdonald will be glad to get rid of us."

He smiled very pleasantly at the worthy Meg, and she hastened to say:

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“Deed, no, sir. I’ll just side the plates an’ things, an’ the place will be at leeberty.”

But he stood up, and David helped him to don the heavy overcoat which he had discarded while at the table. It was a small matter, yet noticeable, that the coat should be lined with the finest quality of Persian lamb, such as is seldom seen except in the headdress of Cossack officers: but not a scrap of the precious material appeared on collar or cuffs.

At the last moment, apparently as an after-thought, Mr. Elwyn picked up Hawley’s letter.

“Would you mind bringing those photographs?—they will be illuminative,” he said, and David obeyed in silence.

They spoke of the horses, the roads, and the weather as they walked the few yards to McDougall’s house, but the American came quickly to the point, once they were seated by the fire and the door was closed.

“May I have that picture, the one in which the young lady you call Mirabel Locksley is standing by the boat——” he began.

David was already aware which photograph among the twelve it was that had specially interested his visitor.

“This is the one, I think,” he said, and Elwyn took it with a silent nod.

He looked at it for a full minute, but his face was now inscrutable. Ultimately he opened a

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pocketbook, produced a small package wrapped in silk, and David's attentive eyes dwelt on a faded, old-fashioned photograph almost of the same size as those which he had obtained of Mirabel. Mr. Elwyn placed the old and the new side by side, scrutinized them steadfastly, and then handed them to David.

"The one picture was taken twenty-five years ago, the other within the past few days—remembering that fact, tell me what relation those two bear to each other?" he said.

David, realizing that some tremendous issue was bound up with that simple request, looked at the photographs with an interest which forthwith yielded to something akin to amazement. At first he could not trust himself to speak. To gain time, he turned to a lamp on the table, and examined each picture in a stronger light. But he could not resist the testimony of his senses. In each case a beautiful and graceful woman had posed in front of the camera while resting against the hull of a stranded yacht; in each case there was a background of sea and sky and rocky foreshore; and in each case it was Mirabel's shy smiling underlook that peeped from under a mass of wavy hair. The fashions of the dresses differed—that was all. The woman of quarter of a century earlier wore a princess robe beneath a cloak thrown carelessly across her shoulders, but the dress was probably blue in color, and came out white in the print, so the illusion of a truly remark-



HE EXAMINED EACH PICTURE IN A STRONG LIGHT. *Page 306.*



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able similarity was assisted by Mirabel's white blouse beneath a cloak adjusted almost in the same way.

"There would appear to be only one possible answer to your question," said David, in a hushed tone. "Those two are mother and daughter."

"That lady was my wife," said Elwyn, resting both elbows on his knees and shading his face with his hands.

Even then David did not understand the full purport of that astounding statement. But he was promptly enlightened.

"How old is your Mirabel?" said the other, after a pause which David found it difficult to break.

"Twenty-two," he said, almost unthinkingly.

But in a second came the memory of this man's curious reiteration of a period—an epoch in his life. Twenty years! And Mirabel was twenty-two! He must have emitted some inarticulate, gasping sound, for his bewilderment rendered speech impossible.

"Yes," said the bowed figure, bent forward in the chair. "You know now. The girl you call Mirabel Locksley is my daughter. Her real name is Miriam Isabel Elwyn. She and her mother were stolen from me twenty years ago, and the man who robbed me of all I held dear on earth was Alexander John Forbes, a professor of philology at Harvard. . . . He may pass under any alias he chooses, but, when I meet Alexander John Forbes, I shall know him. . . . Oh, yes, even though one-half his body be shrunken and dead in paralysis, I shall know the

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other half, for I want to—ah, Heaven forgive me! I want to feel him writhing in his death-agony under my hands.”

David was no puling sentimentalist to shrink in horror from one who announced thus definitely a fixed intention to commit a murder at some future time which might be measured by hours rather than by days. He, too, had acknowledged the sway of fierce and strong passions, and, if what this man said was true—and for some occult reason he was almost as sure of its truth as that the world turned on its axis—not a word of blame or censure could he utter. At any rate, the present was no time for protest or counsel of moderation. His hand fell on the older man's shoulder in a friendly grasp, and his voice was gentle in its sympathy when he said:

“Since you have told me so much, Mr. Elwyn, had you not better tell me all? Remember, I have seen her whom you claim as your daughter. She is dearer to me than aught else on earth. And, when you have taken me into your confidence, I have much to reveal to you. As it happens, I can bridge no small part even of that long gap of twenty years.”

Elwyn raised his head, and looked at David with eyes in which the flame of revenge still burned brightly. But he gave no other sign of the fire that was consuming him. His calmness was more terrible than anger.

“That is why I came to you,” he said. “One of those chances which seem like the direct inter-

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vention of Providence led me to meet your sister in Edinburgh. A slight accident to a cab in London, the missing of a train, the inability of the first hotel I visited to provide me with a room—these things brought me, ultimately, to the hotel where your sister and her husband were staying for the night. Even then I would not have known she was there but for the fact that I inquired from the hall-porter the hour of departure of the Oban train next day, and he, seeing that I was a stranger in Scotland, asked if I was interested in the Lunga Romance, as your adventure is styled by the newspapers. Within five minutes I had sent up my card to Captain Beringer, and he brought me to his wife. She is a most excellent lady, warm-hearted and impulsive, though, so stupid are prepossessions, I feared to find her frigid and unbending when I realized that she was the Mrs. Philip Beringer whom I had seen at a ball in the American Embassy. Her eyes filled with tears when I showed her that photograph, for she had met your Mirabel, and was convinced instantly by the girl's likeness to her mother. Of course, I have other proofs of my story, printed and written. It was blazoned far and wide by the newspapers of the day, and, although public opinion ran somewhat against me in some respects, it was felt to be a cruel and dastardly thing that Forbes should steal my child as well as my wife. And I have her last letter—which no one has seen, but which I am prepared, if necessary, to show to you.

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Your sister is a good woman, Sir David. She told me all that you made known to her, and much that her womanly intuition guessed, and she implored me to come here and be guided by you, for my quarrel with Forbes must be kept apart from my search for a daughter. Here is a letter Mrs. Beringer wrote. I am not aware of its contents, though she seems to have left it purposely unsealed. I did not give it to you earlier because it may allude to circumstances which will be better understood now."

But Doris was tactful as well as kindhearted. She had not blurted out this stricken man's secret in a gush of long adjectives and notes of exclamation.

"*Dear David,*" she wrote, "Mr. William K. Elwyn, who will bring you this, has a moving and pitiful story to tell you. Pray listen to what he has to say, and help, and guide him, and may Heaven direct you both along the path of wisdom and mercy! Mr. Elwyn and I have met once already, it seems—a year ago last May, at a reception and dance in Park Lane—but Phil and I know of him well by repute, for he is one of New York's most liberal-handed patrons of young singers and artists. You will be in great trouble, David, so I am remaining here. Phil must rush off to town, because the Admiralty may be getting restive, but, if you want me, send a wire on Saturday morning. In any case, let me hear from you, as I shall be consumed with anxiety during the next few days. That poor girl! But there, I must leave Mr. Elwyn to give you his news in his own way. Ever your loving sister,

"Doris."

David glanced at his watch. Nearly half-past eight. It was possible that the telegraph office at

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Calgary, though closed, might still call up some more important center, and thus get a message through to Edinburgh. Rising hastily, he explained his purpose. McDougall was a willing messenger, and, in the result, Mrs. Beringer received a telegram about ten o'clock that night. It read:

"Your presence here invaluable. Come Oban to-morrow. Will wire you further particulars there, care Station-master. Advise me before you leave Edinburgh. DAVID."

On re-entering the room, Lindsay found Mr. Elwyn sitting as he had left him, and gazing sorrowfully into the fire. Sad memories were thronging into the man's soul; they had softened his expression, and the evil glint had passed from his eyes.

David had given him Doris's letter before going out, and Elwyn said now:

"Your sister wrote just what I would have expected from such a dear woman, Sir David. She told me that my wife died fourteen years ago. Is her death a fact beyond dispute, do you think?"

"Mirabel herself told me that, and her—Mr. Locksley would have no reason for misleading her as to the date. Indeed, she remembers her mother quite well. They were living in a secluded valley near Monte Carlo at the time."

"I knew it," said the other wearily. "I mean, that is, I had an intuition of something of the sort. Fourteen years ago last January I was engaged in a financial speculation of the utmost importance to

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my own fortunes when I became aware of a call, an irresistible impulse, to go to the South of France. It seemed to be the maddest sort of thing to do, because all my resources were at stake; but I let the markets take their own way, and boarded the next steamer, which happened to be a boat bound for Naples. I was over a fortnight at sea without any possibility of obtaining news, and, when I landed, I was almost stupefied by the cablegrams awaiting me. During those two weeks I had become a very rich man. People who knew nothing of my movements were praising my nerve; my adversaries were in despair because I would not unload my stocks; and my trusted secretary and clerks were frenzied with anxiety lest the market should break before I acted. Some reputations which stand high in the world of finance have been built up in that way, Sir David—just by accident. Had I remained in New York, with my finger on the pulse of Wall Street, I could not have withstood the strain. As it was, I cabled my instructions as a conqueror dictates terms. But the influence which summoned me to Europe had exhausted itself. It called me with a promise of news of my wife and child, and, when I obeyed, it seemed to mock at my folly by pouring undeserved wealth upon me. I persuaded myself that I had been the victim of some hallucination, with an extraordinary sequel in its money-making aspect, but absolutely negative in the one thing I sought. Yet now I believe that my dear wife, when lying at the point

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of death, may have longed to forgive—and be forgiven. . . .”

He stopped abruptly.

“This man, Forbes—you have met him. In your judgment, would he have treated her well?”

“I have every reason to think that the unhappy lady’s early death served to darken and embitter his whole life,” said David candidly.

“It was a marvelous thing that I could never hit upon the least trace of him,” mused the other aloud. “I spent what to many men would be a fortune in searching the world, and my agents thought a hundred times they had found him, but were invariably mistaken. You say he lived near Monte Carlo?”

“For some years, and in the Canton Ticino, in Switzerland.”

“Oddly enough, I fancied I saw him once. After leaving Naples, I went by slow stages along the Italian Riviera. One day, while staying at Ventimiglia, I drove to the famous gardens at La Mortola, and, while wandering through a long, vine-covered pergola which gives constant shade to some rare species of fern, my eyes chanced on a man, dressed in black, who was stooping over a plant. Somehow, his appearance was vaguely familiar, almost startling. I did not see his face, and, as I hurried towards him, he ran down some steps and vanished. But I am not easily shaken off any trail I take up. I made straight for the exit, and found, as I ex-

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pected, that every person entering or leaving these gardens must use the gates abutting on the high-road. I sat in a little café on the opposite side of the way until the place was closed, but the man whom I had seen did not come out. Then I caused inquiry to be made, and a janitor searched the whole of the gardens, but my specter was not to be discovered——”

“I have read of La Mortola,” broke in David. “It stands on a slope near the sea, does it not?”

“Yes.”

“Is it close to the frontier?”

“Perhaps a couple of miles distant—on the Italian side, of course.”

“Not far from the village of Garavan?”

“I believe that is the name of the frontier post.”

“Then it was Locksley, or Forbes, whom you saw that day. He must have recognized you. He escaped by climbing along the cliff, but fell, and was badly injured, and he has never had the full use of his eyes since.”

“But how can *you* be sure of that?” demanded Elwyn sharply.

“I think it is a reasonable assumption. He met with an accident about that time and in that place——”

“Pardon me. I meant his supposed blindness. I suppose he wears dark spectacles?—the simplest form of disguise.”

“Possibly he exaggerates the defect, but I do

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honestly believe his sight suffered permanently, because Mirabel used to read his favorite classics to him."

"Mrs. Beringer said something of that. Is it true that my daughter can speak Greek and Latin?"

"Mr. Elwyn, she is the most highly educated woman I have ever met. No matter what his faults, no one can withhold from Locksley the credit of having molded and perfected in Mirabel a character which is all too rare in these days."

"Yet he forced her to contract a marriage with this Hawley—a blackmailer, a feeble ruffian, whose lack of courage alone kept him from what one may almost term nobler crimes!"

"That is the astounding flaw in Locksley's nature," said David, with sad gravity. "He certainly impressed me as a scholar and a gentleman, and, hard as it may sound in your ears, he had won the full trust and love of the girl who regarded him as her father. Why he should ever have driven her into such an ill-assorted union——"

A queer groan broke from his companion, who flung out his hands in a sudden and passionate protest against fate.

"I know! I understand!" he wailed, in a thin, quavering voice wholly unlike his ordinary well-controlled utterance. "He loved her. He could not bear to part with her. She was her mother reincarnated, and, Heaven help me, my brutality and neglect drove my wife into his arms. But he should

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not have stolen my little girl; no, he should not. I cannot forgive him, even though he has devoted his life to the rearing of my daughter. Don't you see, man? Is not that infernal letter lying on the table the most damning testimony? Hawley—at the time my wife fled, a mere lackey at Harvard, a scullion, a cleaner of boots—blundered upon Forbes's retreat in London—in all likelihood recognized the girl from her mother, and forced his presence on the father. Oh, the wretched history is plain enough! A little pretense, a display of bluff, an affectation of sympathy, and Forbes was at the fellow's mercy. Yet, all the time Hawley was laying his plans to sell him without scruple. First, he must secure the girl in marriage, and then restore her to her millionaire father. A sordid, pitiful intrigue, is it not? And I share in it! Against my better judgment, I entered into negotiations with this vile hound. He stirred me with such promises that I could not bear to remain inactive, but crossed the Atlantic in order to be near him and investigate matters on the spot. That very letter would have been cabled in its entirety from New York. See how Fate delights in torturing me! Even now, after all these years, she makes me a pawn in the miserable plotting which denies my daughter the love of an honest man and will rob her even of the love she bestowed on the father who supplanted me.”

“You must not blame yourself unjustly!” cried David, for Elwyn had worked himself into a parox-

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ysm of excitement, and his face was ivory in its wanness. "I believe most firmly and devoutly that Providence will yet right a good deal of the wrong which has been done, and, if some part seems to remain unredressed, it is not for us to judge the ways of the Almighty. Neither you nor I know what may have happened on Lunga this very day. I see now clearly into an abyss where before all was dark. You have been in correspondence with Hawley?"

"Yes," came the answer, in a laboring sigh of utmost pain.

"Then Locksley knows of it. He has known since yesterday;" and David, after appealing to the other to calm himself and listen, read aloud Mirabel's letter and related Macdonald's discovery.

Elwyn's frenzied mood exhausted itself. When David had finished, he pointed contemptuously to the unopened letter.

"Now," he said, "let us hear what Hawley has to say. He will lie, of course, but we may extract some knowledge from the manner of his lying."

David broke open the envelope. The letter was dated that day, but it bore an address in London.

"*Dear Sir,*" it ran. "My inquiries are tending to a definite issue. You must be prepared for an extraordinary and unexpected development, which, for reasons I hope soon to explain in person, I have not cared, or ventured, to indicate sooner. Anyhow, by the time this letter reaches you, you may receive a cablegram at any hour announcing that your daughter has been found. Of course, you must undertake to be guided by me in the final steps before you meet her.

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There are difficulties, but, with my help, and some patience, they will vanish. I assure you I am not mistaken. Within a fortnight, or less, you will know everything, and you will understand then why I have been unwilling to annoy and distress you earlier with information which I was not then in a position to verify.

“Yours faithfully,

“JAMES R. HAWLEY.”

“A very complete rogue!” murmured Elwyn bitterly. “The ‘extraordinary and unexpected development’ is the fact that my daughter is his wife. When did the marriage take place?”

“On October 6.”

“He first wrote to me on that identical day. His second and more specific letter was dated the 10th. I sailed from New York in the *Mauretania* on the 18th, the day that letter arrived. I reached London on the 24th, and the text of two more letters has been cabled by my secretary. Inquiries showed that the man was known at the address he gave, but had been absent for some time. Then, on the morning of the 29th, came the extraordinary statements in the newspapers. I controlled myself as best as I could until my anxiety became unbearable. And, here I am.”

They talked long, in eager and critical investigation of every known fact and practical theory, until someone knocked at the door, and McDougall entered, explaining that he was bringing a fresh supply of turf for the fire. It was nearly one o'clock.

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Then David rose with a cheerful laugh.

“Let us sleep on our troubles, Mr. Elwyn,” he said. “Breakfast at eight. Will that suit you?”

The older man seemed to have brightened under the rays of David’s optimism.

“Good-night, Sir David,” he said, extending his hand. “We go-ahead Americans sometimes affect a consciousness of superiority to you slow Britons. Let me assure you it is all bunkum. We are of the same breed, and blood will tell in the end. Why, even if we quarrel, it is a family row. As for myself, I am a man slow to give or receive friendship, yet I feel as though I had known you all my life. I was somewhat prepared for it when I left Edinburgh. That sister of yours is great.”

David admired and appreciated the Honorable Mrs. Philip Beringer very thoroughly, but, as he walked down the silent road, he could not help asking himself what Mirabel’s father would think of Mirabel. Would he appreciate her at her true worth? For where was there another to equal Mirabel? Doris was charming, of course. But Mirabel. . . . ! And David sighed his vows to the moon, late risen, and sailing over Tiree among a few white clouds.

He was called back from communing with moon and stars by the joyous whine of a dog, and he was unmistakably startled at finding a black Scotch terrier dancing about him in the roadway with every manifestation of delight.

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“Good Lord!” he said aloud, “you can't be Carlo!”

“Oh, yes, he can, because he is,” said a sweet though rather breathless voice. “I have just climbed the hill, David, after pulling all the way from Lunga, and I was wondering——”

But the wonderment ceased when Mirabel herself was in David's arms, and he had kissed her several times to make sure she was no ghost, and that he had not stepped forth from the sleepy hamlet into some unknown realm of dreams and visions.

Yes, it was really his Mirabel. And what cared he for the morrow when Mirabel was here to-night?

CHAPTER XVII

SHADOWS

WITH the cooing, contented laugh of a woman caught up suddenly in her lover's arms, Mirabel wriggled herself free, for they were standing in the middle of the white road, and she knew not who might be peering through the window in which she had seen a light.

It might be imagined that she would bubble forth in instant explanation of her unlooked-for appearance, but it was not Mirabel's way to utter the thing that was expected—she never did.

"I have missed you, David,—oh, so much!" she sighed. "But—I have not been wholly unhappy. Life is really what we make it, dear, and I think we are meant to be joyous, not sad."

"Then, why not be squeezed some more?" and he reached out for her.

"Because I have hardly any breath left in my body after rowing a boat six long miles and climbing a hill with the heather step."

Still, she allowed him to draw her nearer, for Mirabel was just a woman.

"And now, discourse," said practical David. "I

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give you one minute before we arouse Mrs. Macdonald."

Of course, she answered by asking a question.

"Why were you at McDougall's cottage so late? Is anyone ill?"

"No. A visitor turned up to-day, and he and I talked till we lost count of time."

"A visitor—to Haum Point—at the beginning of November!" Mirabel's voice ran the gamut of interrogation, almost of incredulity.

"Yes. You will learn all about him in the morning. He is a very nice old chap, Elwyn by name. I am sure you will like him. We have wasted that minute, so perforce must take another."

David succeeded admirably in relegating Elwyn's advent to Treshnish to the rank of an incident which might be unusual, but which could have no possible bearing on the drama then holding the stage for Mirabel. She looked up at him—tall and straight though she was, her eyes had to be lifted to gaze into David's at such close quarters. The moonlight gave her a fragile, ethereal appearance. Her lovely face, illumined by those cold rays, might have been chiseled out of marble, but her lips smiled, and her eyes sparkled, and her bosom rose and fell with the slow, deep respirations of perfect health.

"My father sent me, and I am here," she said. "Other story, sir, I have none to tell—or little more than that. After Macdonald left the island to-day, Hawley became positively abusive. He threatened

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to signal in some way to a passing smack, and, finally, dad pacified him by promising to start for the mainland to-morrow—which is to-day now, I suppose, for it must be long after midnight. Hawley was tired, rather worn out by excitement, I fancy, and went to his room early. At ten o'clock I was about to close a book I was reading when my father beckoned me into the porch. His manner was rather mysterious, but I was absolutely thrilled with surprise when he whispered, 'You have a boat hidden somewhere on the island?' 'Yes,' I said, and I am sure I changed color quicker than any chameleon, for I thought no one knew of my skiff except you and Donald, and a few fishermen sworn to secrecy. 'Can you reach Treshnish in safety to-night?' he went on. Then my heart leaped. 'Yes,' I said again. 'Is your friend Lindsay there?' he asked. 'I think so,' I said. 'Go to him,' he said. 'Give him this letter. Tell Donald to send the *Hawk* here to-morrow to take Hawley and me to Oban, but none of the crew must know that you are on shore. Take the dog with you, and go now, silently.' David, he seemed so forlorn and desolate that I refused. Yes, though he might be opening the door to freedom and to you, I could not bring myself to leave him. But he assured me that he was acting for the best, and that his letter to you would make everything clear. Finally, he said that, unless I obeyed him, some scheme he has in mind for dissolving the marriage without any great fuss or difficulty would be wrecked;

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so I kissed him 'Good-by,' and took Carlo in my arms lest he barked, and kissed dad again, and I end as I began by saying, 'Here I am.' Of course, being a woman, there is a postscript to my little speech. Here is your letter. . . . No, there is nothing to pay. . . . We really must be getting under a roof. Whatever o'clock is it?"

Inside the cottage, David struck a match and lighted a lamp. His first act was to ransack a cupboard in which reposed the remains of a meat-pie; his visitors were in need of refreshment, for Mirabel's last meal had been eaten seven hours earlier, and Carlo agreed that he, too, was ready for a snack. David was hunting for a jug of milk when a door opened, and Macdonald appeared, in a fearsome state of dishabille.

"Gosh!" he ejaculated at sight of Mirabel, and vanished; they heard his stage whisper: "Meg, Meg! Up wi' ye! Here's a cure for sair een! Fecks, woman, wake up! It's no the whusky I'm seekin', but ma claes."

Meanwhile, David read the letter which was to "make everything clear." It ran:

"Dear Sir David Lindsay:

"From what little I saw of you, I have no hesitation in intrusting Mirabel to your care. May I suggest that your sister be sent for, and that Mirabel should remain with her, preferably in London, until the present indeterminate state of affairs has ended? In any event, I am sure that my dear one is safe in your hands, and that you will provide her with a chaperon, and make sure of protecting her from any

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unreasonable interference in other respects. Each of you will hear from me in a few days. I shall write to Mrs. Beringer's house in Clarges-street. By that time I hope to have so arranged existing difficulties that there will be no reason why you should not regard me as your sincere friend and well-wisher,

"ARTHUR GEORGE LOCKLEY."

David knew that Mirabel was watching his face as he read, and he strove, with passable success, to keep his vagrant thoughts within bounds. He galloped through the few straight-formed, almost stilted sentences in order to assure himself that they contained nothing calculated to alarm or perplex her. When he asked if she wished to hear what Mr. Locksley had written, she nodded, being at the moment engaged on a piece of solid piecrust; then, springing to his side with some return of her old-time vivacity, she leaned her chin on his shoulder while he deciphered, with more exactness, the delicate and angular, yet scholarly, script.

He was certain, in the absence of actual comparison, that the hand which wrote this letter had written "Alex. J. Forbes, Harvard Univ." in the Elzevir Virgil. Though prepared for the discovery, it shocked him to realize the nearness and identity of that other man, the lighted window of whose room in McDougall's cottage had aroused Mirabel's curiosity.

He noted, too, certain peculiarities of phrase which struck him as intentional. Not only had Locksley alluded to Mirabel as his daughter, but the words

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“unreasonable interference in other respects” surely hinted at positive knowledge of Elwyn’s appearance on the scene, either immediately or in the near future. David owned to an uncanny feeling that the unhappy recluse was peering at him from out of the shadows beyond the table; that he could distinguish the pale, worn, intellectual face, with its masked eyes and air of waiting for the inevitable; that he could hear the unemotional voice saying:

“Mirabel, of course, will be anxious to learn what I have told you. You must maintain my deception for a little while. She will think I am alluding to Hawley, but you will know that I have her father in mind. The truth cannot long be kept from her, but she must be dealt with gently. I, too, want time—yet a little time—before—”

Before what? It was well for David that the girl’s searching eyes could not scan his troubled features, for she was happily munching her crust, and her hair lay soft against his cheek, even while his steady accents belied the doubts and fears in his soul.

“Well,” she said, when he had finished, “it is clear enough now that dad really means to save me from Hawley. But I wonder what his plan is? I shall be in a fever of impatience until I hear from him again. Do you think Mrs. Beringer will receive me? I feel like a waif and a stray. Please may I stop in Edinburgh a few hours and buy some clothes? Dad wouldn’t let me go upstairs at Argos

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to fetch my own money, but he gave me all this—look!”

And, with the delight of an emancipated school-girl intrusted with funds for her first glorious shopping expedition, she produced from a pocket a bundle of banknotes.

David summarily shut down all further discussion till the morning. By this time, Macdonald and his wife were arrayed to receive company, but, as soon as Mirabel had given the fisherman his instructions with regard to the *Hawk*, David insisted that she should retire forthwith to his room, while he himself turned in on the kitchen “settle,” an oaken bench which Mrs. Macdonald made fairly comfortable by emptying her linen cupboard of its contents.

Donald and he were up betimes. The one sped away to Tobermorey on a bicycle; the other did not scruple to arouse Mr. Elwyn from a sound if somewhat belated sleep, for the American had lain awake for many hours.

When David was quite sure that his new friend was in full possession of his faculties, he asked smilingly:

“Can you stand a shock, especially if it is a pleasant one?”

“Call it a tonic, and go right ahead,” was the reply.

“Your daughter is here—at Haum Point. She crossed from the island last night, and you will meet her at breakfast.”

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The tiny window, facing the west, admitted scant light at that hour after dawn, and the expression of Elwyn's face was hardly visible. He was sitting up in bed, but he neither moved nor spoke for several seconds.

"Is she alone?" he said at last, and his voice had become curiously indistinct.

"Yes. The others are leaving Lunga for Oban to-day. Locksley knows, or guesses, that you are close at hand. He has sent your daughter back to you, Mr. Elwyn."

"To me?"

"That is what his action really amounts to. I cannot explain matters fully now, because Mirabel will soon be stirring, and she would be puzzled if she knew that you and I were holding conferences from which she was excluded."

"Who wants to exclude her, Sir David?"

"I do. This man is trying now to act fairly. He must be given a chance. He has promised certain things, and I intend that he shall have an opportunity to carry them through."

"Does that imply that I shall be required to meet my daughter as a total stranger?"

"There is no help for it, Mr. Elwyn. You have found her at last. You will never be parted from her again. But the building up of new relations must be gradual. I know her character and temperament well. The worst thing you could possibly do would be to disrupt her affection for Locksley

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by any display of violence or anger against him. He is the man she recognizes as her father, and the attachment between them is deep and real. I believe most firmly that, while you might convince her reason, you would only succeed in alienating her sympathies by any precipitate act to-day, or during many days to come."

"You must have some powerful motive for urging a course which you can hardly expect me to approve of."

"The best of motives, for it is unselfish. I want Mirabel to become your daughter in love and trust as she is in fact. Locksley has written me a letter, in which he promises to arrange matters satisfactorily at an early date. He asks that Mirabel should be placed in my sister's care, and, irrespective of his past errors, I have every confidence now that he will make good his words. He even undertakes that her marriage shall be annulled, and you know what that means to me. Come, now, Mr. Elwyn, if you try to regard me as your prospective son-in-law, you will hardly suspect me of tendering advice which I cannot justify."

The slight, erect figure sitting bolt upright in the bed bent forward a little.

"You are asking me to forego my vengeance on this man, Sir David," came the cold-drawn words after another long pause.

"It amounts to that."

"And if I refuse?"

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"You will wreck your own happiness, and, perhaps, Mirabel's as well. Locksley is broken-hearted and desolate to-day. You are on the threshold of a new era in your life. Greatly as you may have suffered, this is not the hour when you should think only of crushing your enemy."

"I am not one who forgives merely because a thief is compelled to disgorge."

"You are using hard words. I am tempted almost to regard them as unwarranted. But you strike me as a man who dislikes argument. You would sooner yield to force than to expediency, and I myself am built on those lines. Now, you cannot help yourself, Mr. Elwyn. You must either give me your bond that you will not press your claims for recognition on Mirabel until we hear further from Locksley or I shall prevent you from meeting her."

"Indeed. How?"

David laughed grimly.

"I would hate to have to tell you, Mr. Elwyn," he said.

"Pray don't spare my feelings. You have shown no marked reluctance in that respect by your earlier remarks."

"We are all wild Highlanders together at Haum Point, and you will simply be kept here until Mirabel and I are beyond your reach."

A dry laugh came from the indistinct form.

"David, my boy, I like the way you talk. You don't imagine that I would be such a thundering fool

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as to walk up to a young lady of twenty-two, who has never heard of me, and whom I have not seen since she was an infant, and tell her that she is my daughter. No, sir. It goes against the grain to let Forbes escape; but—I sought guidance on my knees last night, and I feel now that my quarrel with him doesn't amount to a row of beans where my future relations with Mirabel are concerned. And, somehow, I like that new name of hers. Guess her dear mother evolved it out of the first and last syllables of her real names—Miriam Isabel,—that didn't occur to you, I suppose? Well, it couldn't, anyhow. What time is it? And when may I show up? And, seeing that you have fixed everything else, how do you propose to explain my presence here?"

"I have thought of that," said David, aware of a vast relief at Elwyn's common-sense decision. "You are an old Bostonian, and, happening to be in England, on seeing the reports in the newspapers you ran up to Scotland to make the acquaintance of the daughter of a lady you knew many years ago."

"Thin ice, but it may carry us. Your sister will help, too. Are you bringing her here?"

"I think so. Wouldn't that be wise?"

"You can arrange matters exactly as you like, provided always that I am not cut off again from the girl I have lost for twenty years."

Then David's heart went out to the father who had been so cruelly wronged, and he said humbly:

"In asking you to be patient yet a few days, Mr.

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Elwyn, I am moved solely by regard for your own best interests. Mirabel is worth waiting for."

When the three met at breakfast Elwyn was loyal to his pact. His manner was studiously correct, and neither by word or look did he convey a hint of any stronger feeling than the natural pleasure of one who had found in that remote portion of Scotland the daughter of a valued friend last seen in Boston nearly a generation ago.

It was on the tip of Mirabel's tongue to say that she wished he could have met her father, but she remembered Locksley's peculiar habit of mind where Americans were concerned, and forebore. Nevertheless, she hit upon a topic that promised difficulties.

"I hardly remember my mother," she said. "She died in the south of France when I was only eight years old. I can recall her but dimly, yet sometimes, when I look in a mirror, I think I resemble her. Unfortunately, we do not possess a photograph, because—well—there is no harm in telling you that my father disliked photographs."

Elwyn, despite his impassive air, moved uneasily, and was at a loss for words; David well knew why, and broke in instantly:

"By the way, Mirabel, you have not seen the pictures I took. Some of them are rather good. I was showing them to Mr. Elwyn last night, and left them in his room."

The older man rose. He thanked David with a look.

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"Let me bring them," he said. "I can lay my hand on them at once."

"I like your friend, David," said Mirabel, when Elwyn had gone.

"He is really *your* friend: he came to see *you*," said Lindsay, with a quiet smile at the literal truth of the remark.

"But isn't that charming of him? Don't you guess the real romance of it? Is he married?"

"He was, but his wife has been dead many years."

"Did he say how many?"

"I understood that he lost her nearly twenty years ago."

"Oh!" Mirabel pouted, for her theory was seemingly mistaken. "Then it couldn't be as I imagined. I was sure he was in love with mamma when she was a girl, and that father was the favored one, so poor Mr. Elwyn's hair had turned gray prematurely and his eyes had acquired the pathetic look of one who may not find consolation elsewhere—just as you and I would look if—— David, I am talking nonsense. Why don't you stop me?"

Luckily, a messenger from Calgary arrived with a telegram for Lindsay, and at the same moment Mr. Elwyn reappeared with the photographs. Mirabel was delighted with them, and for a whole five minutes forgot her breakfast and David's telegram while she examined each picture.

Lindsay needed all his wits at this juncture, and he anticipated Mirabel's question by saying:

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"My sister is coming here. She will be in Oban this evening, and will reach Treshnish as quickly as possible. I must inquire as to the best route and advise her."

Mirabel's blue eyes opened wide at that.

"How in the world could Mrs. Beringer know that she was in request at Haum Point?" she cried.

"Because the same wire which brought her message from Edinburgh to Calgary connects Calgary with Edinburgh," laughed David.

"But she told me she was returning to London with her husband."

"She exercised a woman's privilege and changed her mind."

"Oh, I see! You knew she was remaining in Scotland?"

"Yes. But the *Hawk* should be rounding Ardnamurchan Point by this time. Let us eat; then we can go out and look for her. Conversation during meals should avoid problems, and Mr. Elwyn has nearly spoiled my appetite already by asking for details of your voyage from Lunga last night."

"I can answer that in one word—blisters," said Mirabel, showing her hands.

"Sir David told me that you came all that long way in a small boat, alone, and at midnight," said Elwyn.

"Not alone, since I had Carlo to talk to, but you will be horrified when you see the boat. My father would never have allowed me to start if he had known

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its size. He cannot see very well, so any boat is a boat to him, whereas *my* boat is a cockle-shell."

Thus, with idle words which played around the grief and mystery of Mirabel's parentage like the twittering of birds before a thunderstorm, did those two men contrive to keep the girl's active mind from probing too deeply into the why and wherefore of the strange circumstances she had found in existence at Treshnish. It was no easy matter, and David had to remain alert and tongue-guarded all day. Here, however, Elwyn's presence was a factor of the utmost value. With fine self-sacrifice—how fine and rarely pathetic the girl could not know till later—he withdrew himself from the lovers' company when they went forth to follow the progress of the *Hawk*. Mirabel did not notice his absence at first, and she and David watched the little steamer cutting a long furrow in the smooth sea as it puffed its way to Lunga.

"Have you ever," said she, "thought how faithfully the ocean obeys the same laws as man?"

"I have often heard it compared with woman," said David, who fancied that his safest line was to be as light-hearted and inconsequent as possible.

"Don't be flippant. Have you never heard of the French academician's definition of women as a 'female biped embraced by man.' Ah! I dare you! The combined forces of the Macdonald and McDougall households are watching us. . . . Seriously, now, David, that blue plain out there is just a map

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of our lives. It reflects the emotions of the heavens ; it is swayed by immeasurable forces ; it smiles, and weeps, and rages according to its mood. And it is so blandly indifferent to the future, exactly as we are, despite all our pretense. Here am I, standing on Haum Point, who yesterday saw it from Lunga as an unattainable ridge humped above the line of the sea, and I am just as content and happy as a robin, who sings because the sun rises and feels sure that Providence will provide him with a worm."

"I am glad your robin is of the masculine gender, or I should feel that you were calling me names. Come with me to Calgary, where we can concoct a telegram to Doris. The *Hawk* will not reach the island for a full hour."

Then Mirabel saw the white-haired man sauntering alone along the road, and her kind heart moved her to ask if he would accompany them. After that, they remained together nearly the whole day. There was a whiff of awkwardness when the girl borrowed a telescope, which she knew was owned by a neighboring farmer, and watched Locksley and Hawley disembarking from the Corran.

"I wish I knew what dad meant to do," she said, and her lips quivered slightly. "Is it wicked to feel as if you were holiday-making when your father is going away on a disagreeable business which you don't understand? Poor dad! He doesn't even realize that I am looking at him and sympathizing with him at this very moment."

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“Wait till you hear from him, dear, and don't worry about troubles which may not exist,” said David, though his conscience smote him as he uttered the words. He knew the truth, and Mirabel did not, yet her sensitive nature had unconsciously seen behind the tragic screen which Locksley had dropped on his intentions and movements. The man was leaving his sanctuary for the wilderness, abandoning all that he held most precious and desirable. What a storm of grief and bitter regrets must be raging in his breast! How he must loathe the plotter who had crept into his retreat and robbed him of peace and love, and what strength of character he had displayed in sending Mirabel from the island without arousing the least suspicion of his purpose in her active brain, while he himself had the torturing conviction that he would never see her again!

Mirabel was so busy observing proceedings on Lunga that David drew somewhat apart and strove to find some likeness between the girl and her father, who was standing close beside her on the headland, with shaded eyes intent on the *Hawk*, a black speck just visible beyond the reefs. Mirabel was poised with the grace of a Winged Victory; she held the telescope, no simple instrument to balance and adjust, with the ease of a sailor. Her mind was fixed on the one object, to discern the figures in the dinghy which was then leaving the Corran, and David made his comparisons unnoticed. He thought he

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could detect physical traits of heredity in the clear-cut profile, the aspect of complete concentration, the air of suppressed yet conscious energy, which form no small part of the birthright of nearly every man and woman born in the United States. Yes, there were links between father and daughter, subtle though undeniable. Different habits of life, different environment—above all, a total absence of the lifelong association which counts for so much in the minor tricks of manner and expression—these things had sundered them, and Mirabel was admittedly her mother's replica, yet they were alike, and, in the years to come, might develop a marked similarity.

So David hardly knew with whom his wayward sympathies rested, whether with the man who had lost a daughter or with him who had gained one.

He was glad when the *Hawk* became a mere blur of smoke in the distance. Mr. Elwyn, who had borne no inconsiderable strain with silent fortitude, proposed that they should drive to Tobermorey for lunch, and this excellent notion was adopted with enthusiasm. They chatted without restraint, and David enjoyed his American friend's obvious amazement when he contrived to extract a series of little lectures from Mirabel on such unusual topics as the dioptric lens in a lighthouse lamp, the geological structure of Mull, the habits of tortoises, the principles of flight as illustrated by the varying bodies of the swallow and the albatross, and the true pur-

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port and scope of the Oceanographical Museum at Monaco. Mirabel, of course, used abstruse scientific terms when necessary, though her expositions were delightfully lucid for the most part, and Elwyn entered fully into the humor of the situation. On the homeward journey, Elwyn himself brought out another side of her singularly versatile equipment by a chance reference to a Wagner cycle he had attended in New York. Mirabel was an enthusiastic admirer of the Ring, and delighted both her hearers by a skillful bit of *leit-motif* hunting, whistling and humming her favorite passages, a harmless pastime to which even the noblest minds may stoop.

Once only did the American express his surprise at the range of her knowledge.

"How have you contrived to study so many subjects?" he asked.

"I have never really studied anything," she said. Then, seeing his puzzled look, she laughed. "I suppose that sounds rather conceited, but it isn't, really. My father amused himself by teaching me, and he took care that I neither forgot nor failed to understand each little step along the upward path."

Mr. Elwyn did not even wince.

"I wonder if I could teach you the true inwardness of the cotton market," he said, with the wholehearted smile which his daughter had certainly retained for her own use.

"Of course you could. Do you know all about cotton?"

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"I have long held pronounced views on the question."

"But that is the very essence of education. Tell me how cotton is grown and how it is sold; give me the history of the market and your own practical experience of it—and what else do I need in order to be able to talk about it?"

"I must introduce you to the delights of 'spot' and 'futures,'" he said.

"I imagine they have little to do with cotton," laughed Mirabel, and the man who had fought many a grim battle with Liverpool and Manchester instantly agreed with her.

Before it was dark she brought them to the little bay where the cobsles landed, and even Lindsay, despite his confidence in her skill and fearlessness, was dismayed when he saw the skiff in which she had crossed the open sea. To dispel Mr. Elwyn's strong disbelief in its stability, Mirabel was demonstrating how hard it was to upset even a small dinghy if one obeyed the rules, when a shrill whistle brought their eyes seaward. The *Hawk* had just rounded Haum Point and was heading for the beach.

Any disquieting speculations as to the cause of this unexpected apparition were speedily silenced by the appearance of Mrs. Beringer standing up in the bows and fluttering a handkerchief, while balancing herself with a hand on a sailor's shoulder.

"I got your telegram, David," explained that lively lady when she was safely ashore, "and was

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thinking of that terribly round-about way to Tobermorey when Tresidder told me the *Hawk* was in Oban. So here I am, hours ahead of time."

One glance at the trio welcoming her arrival warned the tactful Doris how matters stood; she did not even say that Locksley and Hawley had gone to a hotel, and evidently meant to remain in Oban overnight.

It was a lively party which gathered for supper in the cottage, and Mirabel and David had two highly interested auditors for the full and complete story of their adventures on Lunga. Well, not quite complete, for they ignored their later troubles and spoke only of the rose-tinted hours which followed the storm.

Just one tiny episode hinted of graver things. David chanced to mention the ornaments found in the coracle, and they were examined carefully. Elwyn believed they were of great antiquity, the metal being an amalgam of copper and silver, and Mrs. Beringer, scrutinizing an open bracelet, thought that the terminals represented rams' heads.

"I cannot guess how any woman could clasp this thing on her arm unless she had a remarkably small hand," said she.

Mirabel took it.

"Why, it is a Greek bracelet!" she cried. "It must have been brought to Britain by the Phœnicians, or perhaps by some Roman legionary. Look, it goes on this way!" and, giving the coil a slight

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lateral turn, she put it on her wrist before David could prevent her.

He was by no means superstitious, but Mirabel's rounded arm was the last place in which he wished to see that grewsome relic displayed.

"Please take it off," he said quickly. "It has not been cleaned, and verdigris is poisonous."

She obeyed, with a cheerful laugh. They had good reason to remember the incident afterwards. It took place about half-past eight, and at that hour the calm of Oban was disturbed by rumors of a tragedy. Two men, seated at dinner in one of the hotels on the seafront, died with a dramatic suddenness which could only be the outcome of some peculiarly deadly poison. No one knew how the drug had been administered, or what its nature; but the men were dead, and the police were inquiring into the facts of an extraordinary occurrence, because the strangers had arrived in the town that day by sea, and had made all arrangements to leave for London by the first train on the following morning.

So Oban was puzzled, and rather alarmed, and Tresidder sat up half the night trying to concoct a telegram, for a new chapter had been added to the "Lunga Romance," and this man was one of the few who guessed its vital significance to the owner of the *Fire-fly*.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PEACEFUL ISLE

THE four were seated at breakfast when Tresider's telegram arrived. There was some talk of the prospective journey to London, and Oban was chosen as the point of departure by rail, for Lindsay and Elwyn had already evolved a plan whereby any chance of an awkward meeting with the earlier travelers from Lunga would be avoided, when a knock at the door summoned Mrs. Macdonald.

"There's a young man frae Calgary tae see ye, Sir David," she announced, and Lindsay went out, the cottage's living-room being crowded.

The "young man" evidently possessed a high degree of intelligence.

"I've brocht a message which ye'd best read without any ither pairson bein' the wiser, Sir David," he said, when assured that he could not be overheard by those in the cottage.

And this is what David read:

"Regret to say that Mr. Locksley and Mr. Hawley died last night at the ——— Hotel, here. Believed to be case of poisoning. Both were dead before doctor arrived. Have made sure of facts before telegraphing, and will await your orders all day at yard,

"TRESIDDER."

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"Aye, it'll be bad news, I'm thinkin'," said the messenger sympathetically, for David's face showed the depth of horror and uncertainty into which those fateful words had plunged him. Lindsay had no thought for himself. He was incapable of realizing any feature of the tragedy beyond its immediate effect on Mirabel. How would she bear it? Could not the unhappy Locksley have found some other way out of his despair than through the narrow gate of death? What was to be done? His mind refused to act, and he walked aimlessly farther away from the cottage, followed by the youth from Calgary, who understood vaguely that the deaths of two men at Oban would have a profound influence on the people at Haum Point. Tresidder had appreciated the same fact. It breathed from each sentence of his message, wherein the "yard" he alluded to was the dock in which the *Fire-fly* was being repaired.

"Is there anything I can be daein', Sir David?" murmured the man. "The postmaster tellt me I wass tae be sure an' gie the telegram intil yer ain han's, an' not let the young leddy be present."

David was looking at Lunga smiling in the morning sun, and suddenly a mist came over his eyes. Yes, Mirabel must be helped to bear this new burthen. But how? He did not know. He had never been at such a loss for ordered judgment. She must be told, of course, but under what conditions? Was she to mourn Locksley as a father

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whom she loved and respected, or would the shock of his death be lessened if the story of his perfidy were revealed at once? The torturing problem could not have arisen if he had not taken Hawley's life. David knew instantly that the law would brand the suicide as a murderer, too. If Hawley were alive, no consideration would tempt Mirabel's lover to grieve her by defaming the dead, no matter how just the charge. But could he permit her to weep her heart out for one who would be laid in a felon's grave? And, knowing Mirabel as he did, what artifice would prevent her from mourning Locksley? He feared her anger if he kept this thing concealed; had not she herself discovered the eternal truth that love goes hand in hand with fear?

"Will you tell Mr. Elwyn that he is wanted at McDougall's?" said David, and the man left him, glad to be of use even in that small way.

Elwyn came; and the gray head of experience pronounced instantly in favor of silence as to his own relationship with Mirabel. He suggested that they should stroll along the cliff, in case either of the unsuspecting women sought them within the next few minutes; it was he, too, who sent the messenger back to Calgary the richer by a sovereign.

"Now, David," he said, when they were well away from the group of cottages, "I see quite clearly that the straight road of self-sacrifice is the only possible one for me, and that which affects me affects Mirabel. Locksley's death will be a blow, but if a

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natural and unavoidable grief is intensified by discovery of a life-long deception—well, she will regard that as by far the worse of the two, and it will react on me, even on you. Moreover, the affair will create sensation enough as it stands, without being magnified tenfold by the introduction of my name, with its association of long-forgotten drama. Will Locksley have left any documents? Is there any chance of his true identity being found out?”

David threw wide his hands with the gesture of one who is conscious only of darkness and negation.

“I cannot tell,” he said. “There may be evidence in plenty at Lunga, but, if the unfortunate man had this terrible end in view when he wrote the letter which Mirabel brought, I should say that he has explained matters in another letter now in the post and on its way to London.”

“Hawley will have my letters in his possession,” mused the American. “If published, they would give a clew to the press, if not in England, most certainly in New York. That must be stopped. Now, David, here is what I advise. Let the *Hawk* be telegraphed for at once. Your sister must be told; she will break the news to Mirabel far more gently than you. The three of you will go to Oban to-day, where you will assume charge of matters. It is hopeless to try and burke an inquiry in this country, I take it, but I fancy it can be guided and controlled. When you have gone, let Macdonald take me to Lunga. Long before any official search is

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made there, I shall have removed every scrap of information likely to reveal our real secret. Does the scheme commend itself to you? Heaven knows, I have no desire to pry and peer into Locksley's private records, but I see no help for it—do you?"

Thus, planning and contriving, they decided on a general policy which promised the least amount of scandal and publicity, and Lindsay was thanking the older man for his splendid magnanimity when Elwyn uttered a sharp exclamation. The two had turned, and, from the top of the cliff, they could plainly see Mirabel and Mrs. Beringer standing outside McDougall's house. Both women were examining something intently. Their heads were bent, and they seemed to be deep in talk.

"Now, who could have foreseen this?" cried Elwyn, obviously perturbed and excited. "You remember I brought those photographs to your place yesterday?"

"Yes."

"When Mirabel had gone out, I gathered them carefully and took them back to my room. . . . Just now they are precious to me, David. I can gaze my fill at my lost wife and child. . . . Don't you understand? The pictures were not separated. They were all on a little table near my bed. Mirabel has been telling Mrs. Beringer about them, and Mrs. McDougall has quite innocently given her the lot."

"Including the photograph of your wife!"

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David spoke merely to hear his own voice. There could be no manner of doubt as to the cause of his companion's distress. As if Fate had not brought about sufficient complications for the hour, the very thing they were guarding against seemed now to be hovering on the brink of discovery.

The risk was not so great as they imagined. The two ladies hurried to meet them, and Mirabel held her mother's picture in her hand.

"I need hardly ask whose photograph this is?" she said, addressing Mr. Elwyn in her candid, fearless way. "You will be surprised to hear that I have never before seen any picture of my mother, but I cannot tell you how delighted I am to have found one. May I have this copied?"

"It will give me very great pleasure to send you the best reproduction that can be made," said Elwyn gravely.

"But, is it rude of me to ask why such a photograph is in your possession? Here is a name on the back, 'Miriam,' and a place, 'Bar Harbor,' with a date. You must have known my mother before her marriage?"

"Yes, for some years," said Elwyn. He moved to the side of the road and looked out over the sea; this sudden strain had become almost unendurable.

"There!" whispered Mirabel, with a shy glance at David. "I was certain you were wrong. Poor Mr. Elwyn; I have hurt his feelings!"

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She ran after him and put a hand impulsively on his shoulder.

"Do forgive me!" she said softly. "In my joy at finding a token of my dear mother I forgot that she might have been equally dear to others. But I am glad that I resemble her so greatly, and I shall be proud and honored if my warm friendship can go some little way towards keeping her memory green in your heart."

"Yes, my dear girl, it will accomplish that, and more," said Elwyn brokenly, while David thanked his stars that the blunder he had committed concerning Elwyn's marriage in answer to Mirabel's question had been glossed over so easily.

But the incident bore fruit in an unexpected manner. For Mirabel it was the first partial lifting of the curtain of the past. She could not forget it, and, when the time came that she was able to review events calmly, it supplied the key to a mystery at once overwhelming and full of consolation.

She was so eager now to make amends for what she believed to be a somewhat thoughtless reopening of an old wound by her demand for an explanation of the photograph's existence that she was quite distressed when Elwyn stated that he could not accompany the party to Oban; for Mrs. Beringer was adamant in refusing to draw a pall of mourning and tears over the blue sky of a long day at sea. They passed Lunga at noon, and the island looked grim

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and forbidding enough when seen from a distance.

“You dear old place, you seem lonely to-day,” said Mirabel. “If I didn’t know you so well, I would think you were scowling at me. But I shall come back again, my green isle; for I love every scar on your rugged face, and I am sure the father and mother puffins on your rocks tell the young puffins that they needn’t cackle with alarm when they see Carlo and me, because we wouldn’t hurt a feather on their downy bodies. But my poor jackdaw will not welcome me. What can have become of him? Oh, you frowning Cruachan! is that one of your secrets? Some day, will you whisper it to me, as you have breathed others from your clefts?”

She caught some repressed sound from Mrs. Beringer, and bent in quick regret.

“Why should *you* weep, dear?” she asked anxiously. “You must not heed my rambling outpourings to the sea and rocks. I often talk to them—don’t I, David?”

But she understood her friend’s agitation when they reached Oban that evening, and the veil was lifted a little higher—this time on a scene of terror; for Mirabel wore the black livery of grief when next she spoke of Lunga.

Doris Beringer, who had come to love the girl during those days of gloom at Oban, summed up the situation neatly in a letter to her husband.

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"Neither Mirabel nor her island," she wrote, "should be mentioned in the same breath as hearse and cemeteries, yet, by some dramatic contriving of Fate, a period which promises to be by far the most important in her life has begun and ended by the side of an open grave. When David landed on Lunga, and our most charming and lovable Mirabel was watching him timidly from behind some knob of that little hill in the middle of the island, she saw him scooping out a poor sailor's final resting-place; to-day, when her swimming eyes took their last look at Locksley's coffin before it was borne away to the cemetery, she completed a chapter in her history, though she does not know yet how fully. Perhaps I am mistaken in adding that last clause. Neither David nor I have said a word about the past, yet she has given each of us some puzzled looks, and I am sure that a question has hung more than once on her lips. I wonder!"

Mrs. Beringer was shrewd, and her judgment was seldom at fault. The reference to Cruachan as "a little hill" was due, of course, to debasing Sassenach influence on a woman of Highland birth.

As for David, he had no time even for theorizing. He soon found that the only practicable method of closing down official inquiry was to take the authorities completely into his confidence. It had to be established to their satisfaction that the deaths of the two men could not possibly have been caused by a third party. Then there remained a careful sifting of evidence as to the exact way in which Locksley had brought about the double tragedy, and here the man's own testimony was available.

The letter brought from the island by Mirabel led the officials charged with the investigation to request

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that Lindsay's correspondence should be forwarded from London.

Hence, the procurator-fiscal was enabled to read the story of the crime at first-hand, because Locksley's statements were explicit. Evidently foreseeing that his letter might be produced in court, he divided it into two well-defined portions. The second of these, dealing directly with the tragedy, was published. It read:

"Having made up my mind to rid the world of a scoundrel, I have acted methodically. Macdonald was gone early in the day, so, late at night, I sent my daughter and her dog to the mainland in a small boat which she kept on the island for her own use. I did not retire to my room, because sleep was out of the question. For some hours I watched sea and sky as my injured sight would permit, and, when I was sure that no adverse weather conditions had prevented my daughter from making a crossing which would be dangerous in so small a craft unless the sea was smooth, I went inside the house and awaited the dawn. Soon after daybreak Hawley appeared. At first he did not realize that my daughter was gone, nor that I had not slept during the night, but he grew alarmed when I suggested that we should prepare our own breakfast, and he threatened me with physical violence if I did not tell him what had become of his wife. His threats did not move me at all, for I had fathomed the man's character by this time, and he soon became more reasonable, since it was obvious that his only chance of leaving the island quickly, or of ever meeting my daughter again, rested with me. He knew, of course, that my daughter loathed him, but he still believed that he had a hold on me by reason of a bygone episode in my own life. Poor wretch! Seeing that his blackmailing tactics had doomed both himself and me to death, I could well afford to leave him the cheap triumph of self-delusion. My attitude served to calm him. The

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arrival of the *Hawk* to take us to Oban showed that I was acting under some pre-arranged plan, but he had every confidence in his own position, and was confident that I would not be able to shake him off.

"He was certainly perplexed when I made no suspicious move once we were ashore, but he believed that if he kept watch and ward over me he would surely meet my daughter again, sooner or later. He blustered somewhat when I insisted on going to a hotel instead of traveling to London by the first train, but my plea of ill-health, and my known dislike of night journeys by rail, were sufficiently strong factors to keep him within bounds. I am writing this letter in my bedroom behind a locked door. In my medicine case reposes a small flask of the essence of the Furmint grape, better known as Tokay, but, in view of the fact that during the past fourteen years—since the death of my wife—I have regarded self-destruction as a possible end to a broken and comparatively useless life, this particular supply of the rarest wine known to man is fortified with hydrochlorate of nicotine, whose orange-red crystals must lend a strange flavor and color to an imperial vintage. At any rate, Hawley will not recognize either when I persuade him to sample my liqueur; nor will he know that he is dying, for nicotine in crystals is a most potent poison. The heart quickly becomes tetanized and paralyzed, and the effect on the motor nerves is almost instantaneous! Those interested in such matters should refer to the trial of the notorious Count de Bocarné, who was executed in Belgium for the murder of his brother-in-law at the beginning of the last century.

"I regret, of course, the trouble I shall cause by my action, but I have been weighed in the balance and found wanting, and the wretched man who will die with me has chosen, of his own free will, to disturb mighty forces which have lain dormant for many years; he must abide by the result. I refuse to leave him to carry on the evil for which I am primarily responsible. Others before Hawley have played with fire, and it has consumed them. Some are re-born amidst the flames. Had I been stronger, I could have saved this man's life with my own by telephoning for the police

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when first he entered my house at Ealing. But I weakly stooped to bargaining, and the unseen third at the board was death. That is all I have to explain, or plead.

*"Qui n'a plus qu'un moment à vivre,
N'a plus rien à dissimuler."*¹

The studied simplicity of this letter laid bare to Lindsay many things which the same art concealed from others. In the shorter note sent to Haum Point, Locksley had not once alluded to Mirabel as his daughter, because he intended that David should restore her to her rightful father, but in this later narrative of a crime he spoke of the girl constantly as his daughter and never mentioned her name. Nothing could be clearer than his motive. The daughter of the recluse of Lunga, the island goddess who had been compelled to marry Hawley, would vanish with the nine days' wonder evoked by the whole sensational story; but the daughter of a New York millionaire, the girl destined to become the wife of an English baronet, would rise from the ashes of the past.

In that other and more personal part of the document which was suppressed, Locksley gave details of his earlier life. They were painful, and probably quite true, as they spared neither Elwyn nor himself, but Mirabel never heard them and no good purpose could be served now by their resurrection.

¹ "He who has but a moment to live has no longer any cause for dissembling."

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The unhappy man asked Elwyn to allow the girl to inherit his (Locksley's) estate, if only to maintain the house on Lunga in perpetuity, and it was found that his will described her accurately as Miriam Isabel Elwyn, otherwise known as "Mirabel," the testator's adopted daughter. In a letter accompanying the will, and endorsed "To be delivered to my daughter after my death," he revealed the secret of her parentage, but passed lightly over the passionate attachment between her mother and himself which had ended so disastrously.

Elwyn was waiting on the platform at Euston when the two ladies reached London, Lindsay having remained at Oban until the procurator-fiscal had closed his inquiry.

He came forward to meet them, and his manner was that of a friend whose sole design was to offer those minor attentions which make life agreeable. But he received the most pleasant surprise of his life, for Mirabel caught his outstretched hand in both of hers, looked at him with her wise blue eyes, and said quietly:

"Mr. Elwyn, what is my name?"

For an instant he was astounded, but he felt that the hour of concealment had passed, that his self-denial was about to be rewarded.

"My dear," he said, "your name is Miriam Isabel Elwyn."

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"And I am your daughter?"

"Yes, may Heaven be thanked!"

"You will never ask me to think otherwise than kindly of the man who has given his life to secure my happiness?"

"No, my child, I promise that. I forgive him, from my heart. I had forgiven him before he died, for I had seen you."

Mrs. Beringer, guessing from Mirabel's pre-occupied air as they drew near London that something unusual was in the air, had hung back a little when the train entered the station. She saw the girl fling her arms around Mr. Elwyn's neck and watched father and daughter exchanging their first kiss. Then she became vaguely aware that someone was speaking to her, and turned misty eyes on a railway official, who was asking if she had any luggage.

"I b-b-believe so," she quavered, "but you really must w-w-wait a minute."

The man glanced at the black dresses of the two ladies.

"Pore things!" he muttered to a mate, "they've lost somebody—their mother, p'r'aps."

Then they had done with tears. When David came to Clarges-street they all went to Malta for the winter, and there is no brighter or more delightful place in the Mediterranean, if one member of your party is the wife of a naval officer of high rank. In the spring, New York was electrified by the appearance in society of a new star, and a mighty

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growl rose from newspaper-land when it was announced that another beautiful American heiress was about to marry a British aristocrat, which shows that even the wide-eyed American press does not know everything, and, on occasion, can whoop up the wrong spout.

David married his Mirabel on the first Wednesday in June, and on the following Saturday they sailed from New York, bound for Glasgow, without anyone being the wiser, except Elwyn and the purser of the steamer.

“Now, listen to me, you two,” were Elwyn’s parting words. “If you are not waiting for me on the Liverpool landing-stage on the 30th of this month, with a comfortable automobile snorting at the shore-end of the gangway, I’ll—come and fetch you.”

Within eleven days they were on Lunga, where Macdonald, Célestine, Pierre, and a vociferous Carlo were gathered on the Dorlin to welcome them, and a rejuvenated *Fire-fly*, with a dapper master in Tresidder and a smart new hand to replace Farrow, was lying snugly on the beach in her old berth.

The grim old rock glowed at them under the hot sun of a glorious summer’s day, the blue sea danced in a sailing breeze, a group of cattle came down from a glen to watch the excitement, and a jackdaw, deftly trained by Macdonald, shrieked “Mirabel,” though he pronounced it “Meerabel.”

The night, too, was gloriously clear, so Mirabel, still athirst for knowledge, drew her husband to

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the shoulder of Cruachan for another lesson in astronomy.

"I remember a good many of the stars," she said, lifting her sweet face to the heavens. "Taking a line from the Great Bear——"

She was too tempting. That was the joy of her, for she remained a very child after she had become a winsome and gracious woman.

"Suppose we start nearer home," said David, gazing into the twin stars of her eyes.

THE END

